

The True Monster

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A Rosario Vampire and Naruto cross over. Naruto, the hated Kyuubi jinchuuriki is sent to a school for monsters to complete his education before he can return to Konoha. But in a place filled with monsters he wonders just who the true monster is. Nar X Mok

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The true monster

Author's Note: This story is a Rosario + Vampire and Naruto cross over. As a general rule I usually don't like crossovers but I've always liked Naruto and recently discovered Rosario. This story is also a response to a challenge from D-FireX, and I like a good challenge. Since there is currently no option for filing stories under Rosario + Vampire it will go under Naruto. Any of you who are unfamiliar with Rosario can check out the manga at [www. onetrue manga .com](http://www.onetrue manga .com) there is also an anime that you can find on youtube and other places. I don't think it's necessary to enjoy this story, but if you do and enjoy it so much the better.

Naruto sat all alone on the bus except for the driver. He looked out the window at the sunlight and the beautiful countryside. He wouldn't see this again for three years. And when those three years were up he would finally go back to the village.

Seven Years Ago

A very nervous and frightened eight year old looked around at the huge apartment. There was so much space! And there was no garbage anywhere and there were no spray painted signs on any of the walls saying, 'Die,' 'Demon,' or 'Monster.' And best of all the apartment was far away from all those horrible people who hated him.

"Well Naruto, what do you think?" A friendly voice called from the door way.

Naruto looked up to see the smiling face of his caretaker. "It's really great Iruka-sensei! Are we really going to live here?"

Iruka smiled and nodded. He didn't hold it against Naruto what had been done to him on that night his parents had died. To Iruka he was a fellow orphan who was lonely and didn't deserve the treatment he'd received. That was why he had volunteered for this mission.

"That's right Naruto. We'll be living here until you turn eighteen."

"What happens then?"

"Then we go back to Konoha."

The boy suddenly froze. "No! I don't want to! I don't want to go back to where they hate me, to where they want to kill me!"

Seeing the boy's fear, and knowing how justified it was, Iruka quickly knelt down before him and gently put his hands on his shoulders.

"It's all right Naruto. Ten years is a long time, the Hokage thinks that after that much time the people will finally be able to accept you."

"But why do I have to go back at all?"

"Naruto," Iruka spoke carefully. "You understand why you are special and why so many people have... difficulty accepting you right?"

Naruto slowly nodded. The Hokage had explained everything to him before sending him away. "I am the Kyuubi."

"No you're not!" Iruka said sharply. "And don't ever say that again! You are the Kyuubi's container, what is called a jinchuuriki. You hold the Kyuubi within you but that is not who you are. The jailer is not the same as the prisoner."

"If that's true then why does everyone hate me?" Naruto demanded. "The whole reason we're here is because they almost killed me." He closed his eyes and shivered as he remembered the smell of gasoline and pain like nothing he'd ever felt before. "If that's true why would they do that to me?"

Iruka put his arms around the boy and hugged him tight. "Because when people are frightened they do terrible things some times. But the fault is theirs not yours, you are not to blame, not for any of it. Do you understand?"

"I... I guess so, but why do I have to back there?"

Iruka sighed sadly. "Because Naruto, one day you will have great power. For good or for ill you are the living legacy of the fourth Hokage. (Note, Iruka does not know Naruto's parentage. He is referring to the fact that it was the fourth that placed the Kyuubi into Naruto.) And the power you wield will be used in service of the village."

Naruto looked up angrily, but did not speak the thoughts that were in his head. Iruka and the old man were the only ones in the whole world who had ever been decent to him; he didn't want to say something that would make Iruka hate him.

"Listen Naruto, how about we save the unpacking later and go get something to eat? I'll be cooking most of our meals from now on but tonight we can eat out and do some exploring."

"Cool!" Naruto said excitedly and much of his bad mood was dispelled. "Can we go get some ramen?"

Iruka nodded with a wide smile. "Sure."

As they left their new apartment Naruto remembered something. "Oh, Iruka-sensei, what is this place called again?"

"Tokyo," Iruka told him. "We are living in the city of Tokyo."

"You are the student enrolling at Youkai academy?"

The bus driver's words snapped Naruto back to the present. "Uh, yeah I am."

The bus entered into a long dark tunnel. "I should warn you," the driver said. "Youkai academy is a veeeeerrry horrifying place." The driver looked over his shoulder at him; his eyes seemed to be glowing.

Naruto took it all in stride and looked back out into the darkness. "I've seen scary things before," he answered quietly. He rubbed his nose a bit as he thought he could smell gasoline.

The bus dropped him off in front of a scarecrow with a pumpkin head. In the distance a mile or two away he saw the outline of a building he assumed had to be the school. He dropped his back pack and just took a moment to look about. All the letter from the Hokage had said was that he would be attending a very special academy for the next three years. He would not be allowed to leave the academy until his graduation, at which time he would be returned to Konoha to take his place as a Leaf nin and serve the village. In the meantime he was to follow the school rules and at least pass his classes. Without conscious thought he reached up and tugged on his hitai-ite.

The one Iruka had given him.

Three Years Ago

The twelve year old opened his eyes. Standing over him was a serious and sad looking Iruka. "What's the matter Iruka-sensei?"

"Naruto you have to get up, I've just received a special message from the village."

"Uh, o.k." He glanced at the clock next to his bed, it was almost midnight. A still sleepy Naruto followed Iruka into the living room. There Naruto spotted something that really woke him up. "Iruka-sensei, why is your luggage packed? Are we going somewhere?"

Iruka looked at the boy sadly. "I'm sorry Naruto, but I've just been ordered back to the village."

"What?! But what about me?"

"I'm afraid you're to remain here, alone."

Naruto stared up at his precious sensei in stunned silence. "You're... you're leaving me?"

"I don't want to Naruto, but I have to follow the Hokage's orders."

"No!" Naruto shouted, terrified at the thought that he was being left all alone. "The old man would never do that!"

Iruka took a deep breath. "Naruto, the Third Hokage is dead."

"Wh... what?"

"He has actually been gone for about two months now. The letter doesn't go into detail, but two months ago there was a sneak attack on the village. Konoha beat back the invasion, but at high cost. The third Hokage was among those who died to protect the village."

Naruto stood there in silence for a moment as the words sunk in. "The... the old man is really gone?"

Iruka nodded. "I'm afraid he is, and I'm afraid it took this long for me to hear about it because they only just installed the fifth Hokage." Iruka shook his head. "It seems the man they finally got for the job was actually the *third* choice. They offered the position to both Jiraiya and Tsunade but they both refused. So instead Hyuuga Hiashi was made the Fifth Hokage. The new Hokage wants every available ninja to return to the village immediately, that's why I have to leave right now Naruto."

Naruto glomped on to Iruka's waist. "Then take me with you! I'd rather go back to that place where they hate me than be all alone again!"

Iruka put his arms around the boy and tried to comfort him. "I'm so sorry Naruto, I would gladly take you and have you stay with me in the village. But the orders for you are specific, and you have to obey them just as I do." He smiled at him. "Don't be afraid Naruto, I've already taught you what you need to know to defend yourself and I know you'll be all right. Just as I know we'll see each other again one day."

Naruto knew a ninja wasn't supposed to cry but he couldn't seem to help it. He pressed his head against Iruka's chest and cried. "Pleeeeeeease don't go! Please Iruka-sensei! Don't leave me!"

Naruto felt Iruka's hands gently cup his face to have him look upward. Naruto was surprised to see that Iruka was crying too. "I'm so sorry Naruto, I know how unfair this is, but I will give you something very special before I go."

With that Iruka undid his hitai-ite. "This isn't official Naruto; technically you are only a citizen of Konoha and will not become a ninja until you return to the village. But," Iruka tied the hitai-ite around Naruto's forehead. "So far as I am concerned you are a ninja. Be strong and remember everything I have taught you and I know we will meet again one day."

That was how Iruka had said good bye and how he had wound up alone again.

Since that time no one else from the village had ever come out to check on him. He'd received no further help with his ninja training and no news about Iruka or the village. All he got was a monthly check. Then a few months ago he'd received the formal letter from the Hokage instructing him to attend this place.

"Look out!"

Naruto turned just in time to see a beautiful girl staring at him before she plowed into him with her bike.

The both went tumbling over in a pile. When they finally stopped Naruto found himself lying face to face on top of the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. She had long pink hair and the most amazing green eyes, and she was dressed in the same green school uniform he had. He also slowly realized he could feel her breasts pressing up against his chest.

"Sorry!" He quickly sat up and got off of her. "I didn't mean to..."

The girl sat up and gave him a shy and embarrassed smile. "No, I am the one who should apologize. I was feeling a little weak because of my anemia." She looked at him a little startled. "Oh you're bleeding."

Naruto reached up and touched his cheek, sure enough there was a little bit of blood. "Oh, it's nothing don't worry about it."

To his surprise the girl suddenly leaned forward, putting her face only inches from his. Naruto had never managed to get so much as a single date in middle school. To have such a pretty girl so close to him made his heart beat faster and made him suddenly feel very warm.

"Your scent," as she spoke he could feel her hot breath against his skin. "It's so, so... delicious!" Suddenly without warning she put her mouth to his throat and he felt a bite.

"Nani!" It actually wasn't really painful; he was just surprised that a pretty girl would suddenly want to bite him. So despite his surprise he didn't try to pull away. After a moment she released him. He put a hand to his neck. There was a slight mark there, a bit like a hickey, but no wound. What had just happened here?

The girl meanwhile was blushing and seemed almost euphoric. "Oh! Thank you soooo much! Your blood is absolutely delicious!"

He stared at her. Were all really cute girls this weird? "Did you just drink my blood?"

Now looking a bit embarrassed she nodded. "Yes, I apologize for not asking first, it's just that you smelled so delicious I just couldn't resist." She smiled. "I'm a vampire you see."

"A vampire?"

Something in his tone worried her. "Do... do you not like vampires?" She asked worriedly.

Naruto smiled. Weird or not she was really cute and she was actually talking to him. "That depends, are all vampires as cute as you?"

She immediately went red in the face. "Ah..."

Seeing he had embarrassed her he rubbed the back of his head and hoped he had not ruined things. He seemed to have a real gift for saying the wrong things to girls. "Sorry, I was just kidding. Of course I haven't anything against vampires," he looked away for a second. "They're not the ones I hate."

She was a bit surprised at his reply, but relieved that he didn't automatically dislike her. "In that case, would you like to be my friend?"

"Sure!" Naruto couldn't believe his luck. He hadn't been here more than five minutes and he was already friends with this incredibly beautiful, if delusional girl. Honestly, what kind of girl imagines she's a vampire?

With a pleased smile the girl introduced herself. "I am Akashiya Moka."

"I am Uzumaki Naruto."

"Are you a new student like me?"

Naruto nodded. "I sure am."

"That's wonderful! I was really worried because I was all alone, but now I'll have someone to do things with!"

He looked at her in surprise. "I don't think a pretty girl like you will have to worry about being alone." Naruto instantly regretted his words as the girl suddenly blushed again and looked away. Why did he always say the wrong thing? "Anyway Moka, I'd be very glad to hang out with you."

She shyly looked back over to him and nodded.

As the two of them began walking towards the academy Naruto actually felt some hope for the future.

He really should have known better.

Appearances can be...

Even though Naruto spent most of the walk to the academy staring at Moka's beautiful face he did manage to notice a few things that were a bit odd. For one thing even though it was still morning the sky was overcast that it almost seemed like night. Just on the other side of the tunnel it had been bright without a cloud in the sky. He also noted that the academy seemed to be surrounded by a series of graveyards. Again and again as they walked they would pass a number of tombstones, and far more disturbing, human skulls. He had no idea what the local customs or religious beliefs might be but he couldn't think of a reason to leave human skulls sitting out unburied. He thought about pointing some of this out but decided not to. Moka seemed oblivious to what was around them as she eagerly told him about all the things she was hoping to do here in school. It was such a novel experience having a beautiful girl talk to him that he decided not to do anything to ruin it.

As they got closer the appearance of the academy itself began to bother him. The academy was a single large building located on a high cliff. It reminded Naruto of nothing so much as a haunted mansion in some old black and white horror movie. He imagined that some old rich guy must have donated the building and lands to the school. No way would someone actually design a high school to look like this. As he and Moka approached the main entrance they joined a stream of other new students, all of them wearing the same uniform and looking about as if a bit lost. Seeing the other students actually put his mind at ease a bit. He'd started wondering if somehow he and Moka had gotten completely lost and were approaching someone's weird idea of a manor.

As he and Moka were herded towards the auditorium for the entrance ceremony the two of them got separated. She looked back at him and waved shouting she would find him afterwards. He waved back weakly as he watched her get swallowed up by the crowd. *Well that's it. I'll probably never even see her again, or if I do she'll have a*

dozen guys around her. A cute girl like that isn't going to have any trouble making friends. He let out a depressed sigh and found a seat. At least he'd gotten to spend about twenty whole minutes alone with her. It had been nice while it lasted.

Following a long and boring speech about adulthood and the need for organization and hard work and blah, blah, blah Naruto had escaped to try and find his home room. He was relieved to find that the interior of the academy was nothing like the outside of it. Everything looked clean and in good repair, the hall ways were wide and well lit. He didn't have too much trouble finding his home room. Inside were the familiar little wooden chairs and desks he'd used back in middle school. On the large blackboard the teacher had scrawled a huge, 'welcome.' All around him the other new students were talking excitedly. Maybe this wouldn't be so bad. He'd been the class clown and prankster back at his old school, he was sure he could wear the same mask here. He just needed to fit in for the next three years and pass his courses.

Not long after sitting down the home room teacher arrived. She was a young blonde woman with glasses and a weird hair style; two tufts of hair were sticking out almost like a pair of furry ears. She smiled at them and called on them to quiet down. Naruto's very first impression was that she seemed like a typical ditzy blonde, but nice enough.

Once the class had quieted down she introduced herself. "Hello everyone and welcome to Youkai academy! I am your home room teacher Shizuka Nekonome. I think you all already know this, but this is a school built for the sake of monsters to attend!"

And with that a boring, 'welcome to the school' speech became something else. Naruto sat up and actually began paying attention. *What did she just say?* He glanced around the room to see everyone else take it in stride. *Is it me or is everyone in here nuts?*

Meanwhile his teacher pressed on. "Now as you all know the earth has already come under the control of the humans! In order for us monsters to continue to survive, we have no choice but to continue to peacefully coexist with the humans. At this academy, you will be studying, 'How to coexist with humans!'"

Again Naruto carefully glanced around the room to see the reaction of the other students. Some of them were nodding; most were just listening with varying degrees of attention. None of them were acting as though their teacher had gone insane. They were acting as though what she was saying was not unexpected.

"So for that reason," she continued. "As a school rule you will all live your lives at this academy in human form! Do you understand? It's a matter of being able to disguise yourself well as a human! This is the foundation of coexistence. You are never to allow any of your fellow students to know your, 'true form' understand?!"

"Hey teacher," a student across from him called out. "Would it not be better for us to eat up those puny humans? And in the case of beautiful girls, better to molest them?"

Naruto looked at the brawny blonde kid and decided immediately that he didn't like him.

"Oh," his teacher spoke. "Incidentally, here at Youkai academy, the teachers and students are all monsters; there are no genuine humans here! Since this academy is within a secret sacred world! To those humans who come to know of our existence we will bring them **death**... or something."

Despite the sudden revelation that he was surrounded by monsters and would be killed if the truth about him was found out Naruto kept a calm demeanor. He was a ninja, and in the years since Iruka had left he'd been constantly wearing one mask or another. It wasn't hard for him to put on a tranquil face while inside he tried to digest everything he'd found out. Living with a teacher for four years he'd learned a great many useful things. One of them was basic problem

solving. You had to define the problem, identify all possible solutions, and then choose the best one available to you.

"Excuse me," a girl's voice called from the class room door. "After the entrance ceremony I kind of got lost in the school, sorry I'm late."

Nekonome looked over to the girl and smiled. "Oh, that's fine, just take a seat."

"O.k.," Akashiya Moka stepped into the room. Immediately the boys, and even some of the girls, were star struck.

"Who is she?"

"She's so hot!"

"How cute!"

"I'm so glad she's in my class!" Were among the many comments to suddenly be shouted out to her. One of the students, the one who had commented earlier about eating the humans and molesting their woman didn't bother to say anything. He just eyed her hungrily.

Taken aback by all this sudden attention Moka stood there a moment and looked over the classroom. Her eyes suddenly spotted a familiar face. "Naruto-kun!" She shouted happily. "We're in the same class?!" She ran over and gave him a huge hug.

It was a bizarre moment for him. In a room full of monsters, trapped in a life and death situation he was being hugged by the most beautiful girl he'd ever met. And actually feeling pretty happy about it.

Being the first day there were no official classes. They'd only been required to attend the entrance ceremony and meet with their homeroom teacher. Once Nekonome-sensei dismissed them they were free to explore the academy grounds. Before any of the other

boys in class could even approach her Moka grabbed a hold of his arm and swiftly led him out into the hallway.

"Let's go explore!" She'd said excitedly.

Naruto could only smile and nod. Even given the situation he just couldn't help but enjoy being with this girl. Her joy and eagerness were just contagious and Naruto actually found himself sharing in them. He also didn't mind the jealous looks all the guys were sending his direction. Having a beautiful woman on his arm was a new experience for him and a fun one.

Then as they rounded one of the corners a tall blonde student with messy hair stepped straight into their path. Naruto recognized him as the one with the carnivorous attitude towards humans. "Hmm, such a pretty one," he said. "You are called Akashiya Moka are you not? I am your classmate Komiya Saizou!" He then reached out and grabbed Naruto by his jacket and yanked him easily up off his feet. "By the way, why is a beautiful lady like yourself associating with a guy like this?"

Naruto was the one to answer. "Maybe she likes surprises." With his right hand he grabbed a hold of Saizou's wrist. Then with perfect balance he swung his body up and around bringing the back of his right heel straight into the middle of Saizsou's face.

"Ow!" Saizou shouted more in surprise than in pain. He let go of Naruto's jacket and stumbled back a couple steps.

Naruto landed on his feet and from seemingly nowhere produced a pair of kunai. He was in a fighting stance ready to continue. "Watch where you put your hands or you might lose them."

All around them a small crowd gathered eager to watch a fight. *Well I guess that at least is universal in every school, human or monster.* Naruto caught a few snatches of what they were saying, things like, 'rogue monster' and 'forced to attend.' He also noted that a few of

them were commenting on the speed and grace of his attack and wondering what sort of monster he might be. *If they only knew.*

Saizou reached up to touch his nose. He was surprised to see there was actual blood. *Stupid useless weak form.* He looked angrily at the boy who was standing between him and what he wanted. "Lucky shot punk."

"Luck had nothing to do with it."

"I'm feeling generous, so get out of here while you still can." He shifted his attention to Moka who was standing just behind Naruto. "Wouldn't someone like me be far superior to this weakling? Why don't we go off somewhere just the two of us and have some fun?"

Her response was to grab a hold of Naruto's arm and begin leading him back the way they'd come. "I'm sorry! I'm having fun with Naruto now!"

Saizou stood there and watched the two of them runaway. "Run if you wish, I never let anything I want get away from me." *As for you punk you'll be paying for the blood you drew. Yes, you'll be paying large.*

She led them outside on a dead run. They finally came to a halt in a little clearing with the usual tombstones and skulls. They were both panting a bit as Moka looked over to him.

"That was surprising wasn't it? I got a little scared, are you o.k. Naruto?"

He nodded. "Yeah I'm fine." As she looked at him he noticed her blush a bit.

"Thank you," she said softly.

"Huh? For what?"

"For standing up for me," she said. "That was the first time anyone has ever fought for me."

He could feel his own face warming up a bit. Just being with her was enough to make him feel warm inside. But when she said such sweet things to him he thought he might start to melt. "Moka, why do you like me?" He hadn't meant to ask it quite so bluntly, but it had sort of burst out. "I... I mean I'm not exactly the type women go for, and it's pretty obvious you can do a lot better."

"Don't say that!" Moka said tensely. "To me there is no one better than you Naruto-kun!"

The way her eyes were looking into his was making his heart race as though they were running again. "Re... really?"

She nodded swiftly. "Of course! And besides, we're on blood sucking terms."

"Huh?"

"You should be proud of yourself! You have grade A blood Naruto, way better than any of the blood I've had before from blood transfusion packs."

"So basically you see me as a snack?"

She blushed and sighed a bit. "Well actually you know, that was my first time."

"Huh?"

"You're the first person whose body I have ever fed from. You're my first and I will never forget that feeling."

Naruto stared at her feeling at once proud and sort of embarrassed. *I always wanted to be a girl's first, but this really wasn't what I had in mind.*

"Anyway," she grabbed a hold of his arm. "Let's go explore the rest of the campus."

And that was what they did. They spent the rest of the day exploring their new home for the next three years. There were no further incidents. The more time he spent with her the more he really enjoyed her company. He was slowly discovering just how happy being with Moka made him.

At the end of the day they wound up at their dorms.

"Say Naruto, just what sort of monster are you?"

"Why do you ask?" He answered carefully. This question was a dangerous one for him.

"Oh, never mind, it's against the school rules for you to tell me and I don't want you to get into trouble."

"That's right," Naruto said. "We're supposed to stay in human form for the entire time we're here. Speaking of which, you really don't remind me of the vampires I've read about. Looking at you all I can see is a beautiful girl."

She smiled and blushed a bit. "Well thank you, actually it's because of this." She touched the rosary that rested on her chest. "We're I to take this off I would revert to my true form, a scary vampire. Rosaries have the effect of sealing off a vampire's power. Since my original form was hated and caused conflict I put this rosary on myself so I'd keep my vampires powers sealed."

"Wait, are you saying people hated you just because of the power that was inside you?"

She nodded. "Even among fellow monsters we vampires are feared and shunned because we are so powerful." She looked away a bit. "That's why I was worried you might not like me because I was a vampire, that's why you are special to me, because you are willing to

be my friend in spite of that. Until I met you, I had always been alone."

Naruto just stood there and stared at her.

She began feeling a bit self conscious. "Did I say something wrong?"

If I do this, I am putting my life completely in her hands. How can I trust someone I've only known one day? Logically he knew it made no sense. His whole life had been one long lesson in not trusting others. He had given only one person his complete trust, only to have that single precious person abandon him. (He understood it had not been done by choice, but abandonment was still abandonment.) Since then he had not trusted anyone. Even the so called, 'friends' he'd made as the class clown in school had never been shown the truth. In his whole life there was no one he could trust even a little.

And being with Moka he had found himself longing for just that. Listening to her now he was sure that she would understand him. Above all else he wanted to make her a true friend, someone he could trust and reveal his true self to. *It makes sense to my heart if not to my head.*

He grabbed a hold of her hand. "Come with me." He began leading her away from the dorms.

Though surprised she did not try to hold him back. "Where are we going?"

"Somewhere private, I want to tell you something."

Unnoticed in the deepening shadows a figure smiled and began to follow them. "Somewhere private huh? Sounds good to me."

Throughout the long day as they'd run all over the campus the sun had remained hidden behind a thick canopy of dark clouds. It had never gotten much brighter than dusk. Now night was coming and it was becoming truly dark. Naruto hardly noticed, he could see in the dark. Along with his rapid healing, vast chakra reserves, and immunity to poisons it was one of the little, 'gifts' given to him by his resident. He took her to a small clearing in the middle of a forest of withered and blackened trees.

"What's going on Naruto? Why did you bring me here?" Moka asked worriedly. He was looking at her with a strange intensity.

He hesitated, now that he'd gotten her somewhere alone he wasn't sure exactly what to say. Girls were a complete mystery to him. So, as he normally did in these situations, he said the first thing to pop into his mind. "It's terrible being all alone isn't it?"

"What?" She asked fearfully.

Naruto plastered on one of his false smiles. "I know, because I'm alone. In the whole world there's only one person I really care about. He was forced to leave me when I was twelve and I've been alone ever since. In school I was always smiling and playing jokes and pulling pranks. I got labeled as the idiot and class clown, but that was all right because it still meant that I was accepted. People talked to me and laughed at my antics, but the whole time I never made a single real friend. I kept everyone at a safe distance because I was afraid to show them the real me. I would be surrounded by people but still be all alone." She was staring at him. He looked away, feeling stupid for having admitted such weakness to her.

"You're right," she spoke quietly. "It's terrible to be all alone."

She paused for a bit before continuing. "I went to school in the human world before coming here. It was horrible, I felt so isolated and alone. The humans don't believe in monsters. I started to see myself as a freak, as different from everyone else, and to wonder if it

would be better if I didn't exist at all. I really came to hate the humans and the whole human world."

He looked at her. "You... you hate humans?"

She nodded vigorously. "Yes I do, I hate them for making me feel like I was some sort of freak just because of who I was. But you understand that don't you Naruto?" She reached out and took a hold of one of his hands. "You understand because you've faced the same thing. I am so happy that I've met you, because now I finally have a friend and I don't feel lonely anymore!"

She looks so happy, Naruto thought. I want to always make this precious girl happy. But... "Moka," he said. "Would you still feel that way if I were one of the humans that you hate?"

"What do you mean? You're not a human."

He took a deep breath and plunged into the icy water. "I am," he said carefully. "I am what they call a ninja. I can control a special power called chakra and use it to perform some amazing feats called jutsus, but I'm still human."

"No," she let go of his hand and stepped back. "You can't be!"

He saw the look in her eyes, what she thought of him was clear. "So I guess you hate me."

"Naruto, I..."

The moment was interrupted by laughter.

"Now what do we have here? A lover's quarrel?" Saizou approached them with a grin going from ear to ear.

Instinctively Naruto moved to put himself between Saizou and Moka. "What the hell are you doing here?"

Saizou's eyes were running up and down Moka's body. His long tongue swept over his lips. He spared Naruto a momentary glance. "I'm taking her right now, if you want to live get out of here." His eyes looked hungrily back at her. "You are far more beautiful than any of those puny humans I molested. I want you Akashiya Moka!"

"No!" She shouted at him. "I am very sorry but whatever you want I don't want you!"

He laughed as his body began to shake. "I wasn't giving you a choice; I like it best when the girl tries to fight anyway." His school uniform shredded as his body grew and expanded. "Oh, I can't stop myself when I feel like this. I just can't stay in human form anymore."

As Naruto watched Saizou grew to eight feet with a body that was a mass of muscles. "What the hell?"

"Naruto this is his true form!" Moka said desperately. "When a monster is in human form he can access only a fraction of his power. But like this Saizou will be able to draw on all his strength. Please run Naruto! I don't want you to be hurt!"

But Naruto shook his head and quickly tossed away his school jacket to free up his movement. From beneath his shirt he pulled out a pair of kunai. He never went anywhere unarmed, and after years of practice he was expert at concealing weapons. Endless practice had made him skilled with weapons and hand to hand combat. Unfortunately he knew only two basic jutsus; Iruka had been planning to teach him many more but his sudden recall had ruined those plans. Over the years he had written home requesting help only to be ignored. He had tried to locate jutsu scrolls on his own, but they seemed impossible to find outside the ninja lands. He used the henge and substitution jutsus when he could, but he was forced to rely mainly on straight physical combat. He wasn't sure how much good it would do him against such a hulking beast. But there was no way he was going to let this slimy animal touch Moka.

"Moka I need to tell you something," he looked at her with an honest smile. "I don't care that you're a vampire or if you don't like me because of what I am. I care about you and I will protect you, because to me you are a precious friend."

She looked at him, not believing anyone would really risk themselves for her like this. "Naruto..."

"Now please run Moka!" He launched himself at Saizou.

Saizou just laughed and stood his ground. "I'm not in my human form now fool! There's no way such a pathetic attack could hurt me!"

"Let's see!" Naruto shouted. Needing to protect Moka he was not going to fool around and slammed both kunai into the middle of Saizou's chest. But his thick grey hide was like concrete, both blades just bounced off without breaking the skin.

Saizou laughed. "Tickles," he then contemptuously slammed Naruto with the back of his hand and sent him flying through the air and crashing into a tree. "What are you thinking fighting with *weapons* like some pathetic human?! Show me your true form so I can know what kind of weak monster I'm ripping apart."

Moka ran to where Naruto lay crumpled at the base of the tree. He was groaning and spitting out blood. She quickly knelt down and placed his head in her lap. "Why?" She could feel her tears begin to run down her cheek. "Why are you doing this for me?"

Despite the pain he still smiled for her. "I already told you, you're precious to me, even if you don't like me anymore."

"I like you Naruto-kun," she whispered to him as she ran a hand through his blonde spiky hair. "When I was all alone all I ever wanted was a friend, whether he was human or monster never mattered. I like you Naruto, I truly do!"

"Thank you Moka-chan, that means a lot to me." Despite the pain he was happy, Moka cared about him.

"Oh how sweet!" Saizou mocked as he approached the two of them. "Say goodbye to your boyfriend before I tear him limb from limb. Then I'll show you a real good time."

He didn't think he could even stand but he wanted to keep her safe. "Moka please leave me and go." Reaching up he tried to push her away. And as he did so his hand caught on Moka's rosary. With a tiny clink it popped off its chain.

What, the rosary came off! But that means... She was suddenly engulfed in a powerful demonic aura as her body transformed back into its true form.

Saizou quickly backed away, sensing and actually seeing the unbelievable power all around Moka. "What... what is this overpowering sensation?!"

Naruto stared up at her. As he watched she seemed to grow and mature from a teenager into an adult woman. Her hair became silver and her eyes were slitted and red. And out of her mouth he could see a pair of fangs. Impossible as it seemed Naruto thought she was even more beautiful in this, her true form.

Feeling real fear Saizou continued to move away from her. "Just like the legends! Such intense super natural energy! This... this is a true vampire?!"

Now fully transformed she turned to Saizou and teased him. "What's wrong rogue one? You want me right? Just try and take me by force. Won't you?" She laughed at him mockingly.

"I won't be mocked by a woman!" Howling he suddenly rushed forward.

"Moka look out!" Naruto shouted.

As Saizou reached out for her she seemed to become a blur. A single kick smashed in his jaw and sent him flying with a spray of dark blood. "Attacking me with such weak power, you are beneath my contempt. Know your place!"

He crashed through not one but several trees before finally coming to a stop, broken and unconscious.

"A low class monster like you who has nothing to show for his size doesn't even make a decent opponent." With that she turned around and began walking back towards Naruto.

Naruto managed to at least get back up to his feet, though he had to lean against the tree for support. "Mo... Moka?" Her eyes were looking into his and he couldn't seem to make himself look away.

"Are you hurt Uzumaki Naruto? Shall I take you to the infirmary?" She walked right up to him until they were face to face.

"Uh, no, that's all right, I heal very fast." He felt himself shaking just a little.

She grinned with her fangs coming out of her lips. "What's wrong? Are you scared? Of this me..."

"I, uh..."

With a single finger she reached out and gently ran it over his lips. When she pulled it back he noticed some of his blood was on it. She held her finger before her mouth and he watched as she licked it clean. "Mmm, your blood really is delicious. I can see why my sleeping self likes it so much."

She reached out again and he felt her hand brush against his. "Don't be afraid, I have no intention of harming you." He noticed she now held the rosary, he hadn't even realized he'd been holding it. "Until we meet again, you had better baby sit the sentimental other Moka."

She place the rosary back on the end of the chain she wore around her neck

Almost immediately her power faded away and she was transformed into the teenage, 'outer' Moka. She was unconscious and Naruto had to catch her before she could fall. Talking to the transformed Moka had really been like talking to a whole different person. And the way she had referred to herself as, 'the other Moka.' It seemed likely she had a split personality.

Looking at the beautiful girl in his arms, he knew things would not be easy. He could only imagine how being friends with a beautiful vampire with two personalities would complicate his life. But even contemplating that he still smiled at her. Carefully he swung an arm under her legs and began to carry her bridal style back to the academy. Though she was asleep he spoke to her.

"I want to protect you Moka-chan, just as you did me. I want to always keep you safe and happy. And I promise I will always try to do just that." He smiled at her peaceful sleeping face. "And so you know, I never break a promise."

Two new girls

His dorm room was a square fifteen feet by fifteen feet. Included was a small closet, a sleeping mat, a desk with a single chair, and a small combination fridge / microwave. The best thing that could be said about the room was that it was a single. Having gotten Moka to her dorm he had finally made it back to his. He was dirty, tired, and still feeling bruised and battered. Seeing the sleeping mat he dropped his back pack and lay down. He was soon asleep.

He had the dream again, or rather the nightmare. He could feel the ropes biting into his hands. He could hear them cursing him, their voices so filled with hatred and rage. He could hear his own screams, begging them to stop, asking them what he had done to deserve this, promising to do anything if they would just stop. And overpowering everything else was the smell of gasoline.

"No, don't!" He screamed and sat up. His heart was pounding and he was breathing hard. His body was covered in a cold sweat. Waking up in the pitch black he needed a moment to figure out where he was.

That's right; I'm in my room at Youkai academy. It was all just a bad dream, I'm safe. It took him a moment to completely settle down. As he did so he reflected on what a strange thought that was. Here he was surrounded by monsters who would kill him if they learned he was human. Yet he found that less frightening than a dream.

Well, he knew there was no chance of going back to sleep tonight. He checked the watch that he hadn't bothered to take off his wrist. Even in complete darkness he could read the numerals that flashed 4:12 a.m. That was great, class didn't begin until 8. Tossing aside his blankest he stood up and did some quick stretches. His ribs no longer ached, his back had stopped throbbing, and his right shoulder

seemed to be o.k. now. As he'd expected just a few hours rest had been enough for him to completely recover. Stumbling over to the door he found the light switch and turned it on. Opening up his back pack he took out a large grey sweat shirt and some track shorts. Since he had nothing better to do he would go do some early morning training.

He ran five laps around the campus and then scouted out a good spot in the woods not too far from the dorm. There he did some basic exercises like jumping jacks, sit ups, push ups, and chin ups using a tree branch for a bar. What he really wanted to do was work on his taijutsu and fighting styles. Unfortunately he didn't have a sparring partner. *I wonder if Moka would mind sparring with me?* He wasn't sure if it was really proper for a guy to ask a girl to spar with him. Then again, she was a bad ass vampire. He had a sudden image of Moka standing there in a fighting stance with nothing but shorts and a tee shirt on. His heart beat immediately picked up at the mental image. *Yeah, I definitely need to ask her about it.*

In any case that was something for later. He decided to work on chakra control. He picked out the tallest tree and immediately ran straight up its side to the very top. When he got there he pivoted and ran all the way down to the ground where he repeated the process. Doing this with an actual tree was a first for him. Previously he had only ever done this exercise on the walls and ceiling of his apartment with all the windows drawn tight. Iruka had warned him that if anyone even suspected he could use chakra he would be forced to move again and start all over. So his chakra and jutsu training had always involved the highest degree of secrecy.

Here though the rules were different. If someone happened to spot him using chakra it would not be a problem. As a matter of fact, from his point of view it would be a good thing. After all, it would be proof he was some type of monster right? No ordinary human could run up and down the side of a tree right? In fact that thought gave him a good idea for later. Something that might be a little amusing and help

him reestablish his reputation as a master clown / prankster. He was very glad that he and Moka were now true friends, but he still needed to establish himself with the rest of the school. He could not have cared less about people respecting or looking up to him, he just needed to fit in for the next three years. Having everyone see him as the lovable and unassuming class clown would make that easy.

After running up and down the tree a hundred times he came to a stop and checked his watch, the sky seemed to be getting a little bit lighter. It was now 6:15 a.m., that was good, he could now go back to the dorm take a shower, dress, have a quick breakfast, and then get to class. But he still had time to do one more thing.

"I don't know why I even bother," he muttered to himself before running through the hand signs. " **Bushin no Jutsu.** "

There was a large puff of smoke. When it cleared there were three sickly pale looking clones lying on the ground around him. As he watched two of them puffed out of existence without his doing anything. "Damn it! Why does it never work?!"

Iruka-sensei had actually taught him three jutsus before being recalled, the henge, the substitution, and the bushin. He had gotten the first two down without too much trouble. (Iruka was a great teacher and always patient.) But even after years of practice and improving his chakra control he still couldn't make a single damn bushin! He had failed so many times he'd been convinced he had to be doing the signs wrong some how. But Iruka had insisted his hand signs were perfect. The problem was he had so much chakra he kept overloading the bushins, he just needed to put in the right amount of chakra and his clones would be perfect. But no matter how hard he worked on chakra control he could never work a small enough flow. It was sort of like trying to fill a shot glass using a fire hose. It was so frustrating! He seemed to have limitless chakra and he couldn't do anything with it!

"Enough of this," the last half made bushin disappeared. "I'm heading back."

And as he left he never realized that someone had been watching, someone who was filled with excitement at what had just been witnessed.

"Hey!"

"Watch it!"

"Slow down!"

The many girls in the dorm hall way shouted as she ran past them, she didn't care. She had made the most amazing discovery this morning by sheer accident. She had gotten up early, too excited and too nervous to go back to sleep. She'd decided to go for a walk to relax and work off some of her energy. As she'd done so she'd spotted something, a person running up and down a tree. Curious she had decided to sneak in closer and see what was going on. That was when she'd seen it! The blonde haired boy had moved his hands around and made some images of himself appear! There was no question about it! It was a spell! It was magic! The spell hadn't worked very well, but that wasn't the point. The point was she wasn't the only one of her kind here! She wasn't alone!

Bursting into her room she ran over to her desk and the stacks of books piled on top of it. "Where is it, where is it, where is it?" She scanned the book titles and moved the many stacks about. "There it is!" She pulled out the leather jacketed book she'd been looking for. Its title was, 'The supernatural beings of the Earth.'

She quickly began looking through the chapters, there were hundreds of them. She knew he couldn't be an ordinary wizard for two reasons. One, he hadn't used any type of material component to work his spell. All magic users had to have some sort of physical item in order to focus their magic, something like a spell book or a rod or a wand like the one she used. And secondly all magic users drew their power from nature and could sense when that power was being used. She had sensed nothing when he worked his spell, that

meant he had to be drawing his magic from some other source. All this meant that his magic was a little different from hers, but he was still like her.

"Found it!" She opened the correct page and eagerly began reading the information. And as she read she began to smile. "I knew it!" She said excitedly. "He's a ninja!"

A hot shower, some clean clothes, and a good breakfast had Naruto feeling fine and ready to face a new day. Hopefully he wouldn't come so close to death today as he had yesterday. The dorms were located about a half mile from the academy and he was taking a nice leisurely walk. As he did so he let himself carefully consider his current situation. He was trapped for the next three years in a place filled with powerful monsters where he could be killed at any moment just for being human. That was the problem. Now as he saw it he really only had two options. He could simply leave. He had checked the school bus schedule. During the first week of class there was a bus leaving every day for the human world. Apparently a lot of the incoming first years decided they didn't like it and quit. All he had to do was write a school withdrawal notice and he could just go.

There were two little problems with that though. First off, if he left the academy without permission the Hokage would see that as desertion. Iruka had explained to him a long time ago that even though he was not a ninja he was expected to obey the orders of the Hokage like one. If he left Youkai academy without the Hokage's permission he would have to spend the rest of his life hiding. The hunter nins would come after him, and they would never stop. Then there was the little fact that if he left he would never see Moka again. He couldn't even imagine never seeing her again and never hearing her sweet voice. It was crazy that someone he had not even known two days ago could have become so important to him. Yet he was ready to face death just to be with her.

That left the other option, stay and try to survive the next three years. That didn't seem as impossible as it had yesterday. Given his ninja

skills it shouldn't be too hard to convince people he was something more than human. And since you were expected to keep your true form a secret during your entire stay no one would be surprised if he didn't tell anyone what sort of, 'monster' he was. But after yesterday he was starting to suspect that just day to day survival might be a challenge. Was Saizou's behavior the exception or the rule? How many of the other powerful monsters sitting in class had hair triggers and were willing to attack someone to get what they wanted? Just how many serious battles was he going to have to fight over the next three years just to survive?

"I can't depend on Moka to keep saving me," he said to himself. "I have to get stronger." *Yeah, get stronger, like I haven't been trying to do that over the last three years. How do I get stronger in the ninja arts without a teacher, or at the very least some jutsu scrolls?*

His thoughts were interrupted by a commotion.

"Wow check her out!"

"She is soooo gorgeous!"

"What a girl!"

"I love you! Please go out with me!"

Hearing all the boys shouting and pleading Naruto was not exactly surprised when he caught sight of the cause. "Hey Moka-chan," he gave her a wave.

Spotting him she smiled and immediately rushed over. "Naruto-kun how are you feeling? Are you all right?"

He smiled and flexed his arms to show her how spry he was feeling. "Oh I'm totally healed up. I feel great."

"I'm so glad." She leaned in close to him. "Mmmm, you know Naruto-kun I didn't have any breakfast this morning and am feeling sooooo

hungry right now."

"You want to get something to eat?"

"Yes please!" She immediately leaned in and bit his neck.

"Hey! I didn't mean me!"

At the sight of Moka biting him all the other boys let out a jealous groan along with more than a few death threats. Naruto actually enjoyed having so many people envy him. The promises of swift and violent death he could have done without.

When Moka finally let go of him she looked absolutely content. "Sorry, it's just because your aroma is so good, I couldn't help myself. Thanks for the treat."

He rubbed the bruise where she'd just bitten him. "I know you're a vampire, and I don't mind giving you some of my blood. But could you *please* ask first before you turn me into your own personal buffet?"

She smiled. "Of course Naruto-kun. Your blood really is the yummiest! I think I'm going to get addicted to you." With a laugh she set off. "I'll meet you in home room Naruto-kun!"

As Moka left the other boys glared at him but went after her. Naruto decided to take a minute to let them get some distance. *The most beautiful girl I've ever met is getting addicted to the taste of my blood* . He kept rubbing his neck . *Is that a good thing?*

"Someone... someone please help."

"Huh?" Naruto looked about. *Did someone just call for help?*

"Someone please..."

It sounded like a girl's voice coming from the woods. "Hello? Is someone there?" he knew it wasn't the smartest thing to do, but he

couldn't ignore a call for help. He left the path and headed into the woods.

It wasn't hard to find her. She was sitting underneath a tree looking up at him with this vulnerable expression. She was obviously a student; she had on the same little skirt all the girls wore and a yellow sweater. She had blue hair and he couldn't help but notice she had absolutely huge breasts.

"Help me, please," she called to him weakly. "Please lend me a hand. I just suddenly started to feel ill." She held a hand out to him.

"Of course," he carefully helped her up to her feet. "Are you all right? Would you like to go to the infirmary?"

"Oh thank you," she said gratefully. "I've always had a weak body." As she stood there she seemed to sway a bit. "Ah my chest, my chest just started hurting all of a sudden." Without warning she seemed to pitch forward and collapse into his arms. "Please hold me tight like this." He could feel her huge breast pressing against him.

"Wh... what?" *Wow! This feels great! Her boobs are so soft!*

"My chest feels like it's going to burst! It helps if you'll just hold me close for a little bit, please?"

"Su... sure," he did as she asked and put his arms around her. As he held her close she seemed to be rubbing herself against him. *Whoa, whoa, whoa this feels really good!* Then for some reason he wondered what Moka would think if she were present. He felt a sudden flash of guilt. "Ah, maybe I really should get you to the infirmary."

"Oh how thoughtful of you!" She looked up at him with eyes that were the most amazing shade of purple. Something about her eyes seemed to hold him in place. "I am Kurono Kurumu. Please be a good friend to me o.k.?"

Wow her eyes are pretty. What is this strange feeling? I like it whatever it is. She is much prettier than Moka. The thought of Moka brought an image of her face into his mind. It also brought a memory; he remembered carrying her in his arms through the darkness. He remembered what it had felt like knowing that he was the one who would see her safely to her room.

He suddenly shut his eyes and deliberately pushed her away... hard.

Kurumu was caught totally off guard and fell flat on her ass. "Ow!" she rubbed her bottom and glared up at him. "What was that?"

"I'm sorry, I'm very sorry, but I have to go." Some instinct was telling him that if he didn't get away something bad would happen, something he would regret. He turned around and *ran*.

"Hey! What about me and my chest?!" She shouted after him but it was no good, he was already gone. *He broke my charm?! That's impossible! I am a succubus! I was literally made to seduce and control men! It's what I'm freaking built for!* Angrily she got back up on her feet, nothing hurting but her pride. "Damn that Moka, what kind of power does she have over him?" It didn't matter, she would still take him away from her and show whole school just who the sexiest girl in Youkai academy was.

"What are you doing?" Moka was smiling at him, clearly amused.

"What?" He answered innocently. "I'm just going to first period." Most of the other students were pointing at him and laughing or at least looking amused.

"But why are you walking on the ceiling though?"

He grinned. "I want everyone to wonder just what sort of monster I am."

"Oh I see," she nodded. "Very clever Naruto-kun."

He had made it to his homeroom on time to find every seat near Moka filled with an adoring boy. He hadn't been worried about it; he was just relieved to see Moka wave a greeting to him as though nothing was out of the ordinary. He'd then sat down at an open seat. Moka had immediately gotten up from where she was sitting and moved to the empty seat next to him. It was a nice way to start the first day of regular classes. And now they were both headed to the same first period class.

But as they were walking a little girl with light brown hair and wearing a pointy black hat and a small black cape stepped in front of Moka. She looked much too young to be even a first year student; she looked like a grade schooler. She had what looked like a wand clutched in her right hand, using it like a pointer she pointed it at Naruto. Specifically at his forehead, at his hitai-ite.

"I finally found you," she squeaked excitedly.

Naruto hadn't seen her before, today just seemed his day for meeting weird girls. He released his hold on the ceiling and landed on his feet beside Moka. "I'm sorry, but have we met? I am Uzumaki Naruto and this is my friend Akashiya Moka."

"Hello," Moka greeted her.

The girl nodded but her focus stayed on Naruto. "I am Sendou Yukari, I am a witch and you are a ninja."

"What?" Naruto felt as though he'd been caught in an ambush. "Why would you say that?"

She pulled her book out and excitedly began flipping through pages. "I was out for a walk this morning and I saw you using magic, oh wait, you ninja don't call it that do you? You call it chakra right? And instead of spells you use jutsus."

Both he and Moka were looking nervous. The people in the hallway had stopped to watch the scene and they were starting to whisper to

one another.

Oh crap this is really bad! He tried to laugh it off. "I'm sorry but you must be mistaken."

Yukari shook her head vehemently. "I'm not mistaken, you are definitely a ninja. And if I needed any more proof that head band you're wearing cinches it." She showed him a page in her book displaying twenty different designs. She pointed to one that was an exact replica of the symbol on his hitai-ite. "You are wearing the leaf symbol of Konohagakure; you are definitely a ninja from there aren't you?"

Well so much for convincing people I'm some sort of monster. Naruto looked around at the students surrounding him in the hall way and wondered if he was going to have to fight his way out of the academy.

One of the nearby students turned to another. "What's a ninja?"

The other student looked at Naruto as though he were something a dog had left on a sidewalk. "He's like a witch, he's a half breed."

The first student looked back at him in wonder. "Why would a beauty like Moka waste her time with a half breed?"

The mood of the students changed as that word, 'half breed' was repeated again and again. But at least the mood wasn't anger, more like a general contempt. And rather than attack the other students began moving again towards their classes.

"All right what just happened here? And why is everyone suddenly calling me a half breed?" Naruto asked.

"That's what they call people like us," Yukari explained. "Humans with supernatural powers, we straddle the border between the human and supernatural worlds. So true monsters look down their noses at us."

"But if they know I'm human why didn't they attack me? Or at the very least raise an alarm?"

Yukari looked at him in confusion. "Why would they do that?"

"I thought humans who found out about this place were killed on sight. That's what Nekonome-sensei said yesterday."

"That's only for ordinary humans, and we're not ordinary are we? Witches and ninja are considered supernatural beings so we're allowed to attend."

"I see," Naruto said slowly. "But we're not exactly welcome are we?" He looked down at her crossly. "Why did you go out of your way to make things harder for me? Do you have something against ninja?"

Yukari looked up at him in surprise. "No! I wasn't trying to make things harder for you. I was just so excited I wanted to let you know that you weren't alone here! I know how lonely being the only human in a school filled with monsters can be. And besides," she suddenly ran up and glomped on to his chest. "I LOVE YOU!!"

"What?" Naruto said startled.

"Hey!" Moka shouted.

Out of seemingly nowhere a blue haired girl suddenly appeared and yanked Yukari off Naruto. "Stop that! He belongs to me!" She then immediately took Yukari's place wrapping herself around Naruto and pressing her oversized chest against his.

Moka was staring at the newcomer and the way she was rubbing herself against him. "Naruto-kun who is this?"

The girl grinned at Moka while continuing to shamelessly grind against the boy. "I am Kurono Kurumu, your rival. I'm going to prove to all the boys in this school that I am the number beauty here, not

you. And I intend to prove it to everyone by stealing away the boy you obviously like best."

Despite the pleasant sensation of Kurumu's body pressing against his Naruto was suddenly feeling very uncomfortable. "Sorry, got to get to class." He performed a couple hand signs. There was a puff of smoke and Kurumu suddenly found herself trying to seduce a small log.

So far it had been a pretty interesting first day of class.

Hell hath no fury

The classes themselves were all in familiar subjects. His very first one was Calculus, the bane of his existence. (As a rule Naruto had no use for any math that involved letters.) He and Moka shared only two classes. When they were together she made a point of always sitting next to him. Word of his encounter with Yukari seemed to spread quickly. He noticed that many of the students would give him looks. Mercifully they were not the rage filled looks that still stained his nightmares. No, most of the looks were of a mild contempt or dislike and not all of the students gave them to him. But enough did for him to realize that though he was now an accepted part of the school, he was not a well liked one.

When class ended he found Moka waiting for him outside the main entrance. She was of course surrounded by a small crowd of adoring boys. She quickly but politely escaped their clutches so that she could come over to him. After greeting him and asking how his day had gone she wrapped herself around one of his arms and they headed back to the dorms. Moka was in an excited and talkative mood and eager to share how her day had gone.

Naruto was more than happy just to listen to her. She had the most amazing smile and it pleased him just to see her happy. *I want to always see her smiling.* He was not going to depress her with how things were going for him. After all, at least he didn't have to worry about being found out any more. Everyone now knew he was a human and his life had not been ended. Though he didn't much care for how some people were treating him he'd known worse, much *much* worse, and knew he could deal with a few nasty looks and rude comments. So long as he got to spend time with Moka he figured he could deal with anything and still count himself lucky.

They were most of the way back to the dorm when a metal pot seemed to materialize and then drop right on top of Moka's head.

Bam!

"Ow!" Moka shouted and started rubbing the top of her head.

"Are you all right Moka-chan?" Naruto asked.

That was when an upset looking Yukari stepped out in front of them angrily waving her wand at Moka. "Hey you! Stay away from my boyfriend!"

"Boyfriend?" Naruto said faintly.

Yukari looked up at him pleadingly. "Yes! I love you! So won't you please go out with me?"

Still rubbing the top of her head Moka never the less gave the little girl a friendly look. "I think..."

"No one was talking to you vampire!" She waved her wand and a second larger pot landed on Moka's head.

Bam!

"Ow!"

"I'll use my magic to protect my boyfriend from any of you monsters who would just end up hurting him!"

"O.k. that's enough!" Naruto rushed over to Yukari and easily snatched the wand out of her hand.

"Hey! Give that back! I can't do my magic without it!"

"Oh really?" Naruto took the wand in both hands. "Then I guess if I were to snap it in half..."

"Please don't!" Yukari cried out. "Why are you being so mean to me? I just want to help you!"

"You mean like this morning when you told the whole school I was a ninja? That wasn't a help."

Yukari looked up at him unhappily. "I'm sorry about that, but it's better this way. Now you don't have to pretend to be something you're not. This way it's easy for us to be together."

Naruto's face darkened. "You did it on purpose. I actually thought it might have been a mistake made by an over excited little girl."

"I'm not a little girl!"

"Just how old are you?"

"Eleven, and before you ask I'm here because I'm a genius and I skipped a few grades."

"Well I should just go ahead and snap this thing in half for all the trouble you've caused me and for attacking Moka-chan."

"But she's going to hurt you!" Yukari said desperately. "She's not like you and me! There's no way she could care about you like I could!"

"How can you say that? You don't even know her."

"I know she's a monster," Yukari said darkly. "I know how they treat people like us, like we're so unworthy and so beneath them. And if the rumors are true and she's a vampire that only makes it even worse! Vampires are among the most powerful monsters and the worst elitists. She'll never truly care about you; the best you can hope for is that she'll use you for awhile before she gets tired of you."

"That's not true," Moka said. "Yukari-san, please believe that I would never use Naruto-kun like that. To me Naruto-kun is my most precious friend. I treasure his friendship and his company, Naruto-kun is very special to me." She smiled at him and Naruto could feel his heart beating faster. "Also his blood is much too delicious for me to ever stop seeing him."

"Ah, well that last part aside, you can see that Moka-chan isn't trying to use me and she doesn't treat as any sort of inferior."

"What would you know?!" Yukari said angrily. "This is your first time in a monster school. I've been in them since I was five; I know what they're like!"

"Don't prejudge Moka-chan just because she is a monster, isn't that what some of them do when they call us half breed?"

"It's not the same! I thought you'd understand!"

Naruto shook his head. "I understand that you're doing the same thing that others are doing to you. You're condemning Moka without even trying to get to know her. Moka-chan is a kind sweet girl and very precious to me." Since he was looking at Yukari he failed to notice Moka's face turn a bright red. "I won't let anyone attack her, even if it's with cookware. I'll give you this back if you promise not to attack her anymore."

"You're so stupid," Yukari sounded bitter. "You care more about that vampire than you do about me."

"That's because Moka-chan is my friend while you're a girl who's trying to force me to be her boyfriend. I don't care if she's a vampire, I only care that she's my friend." He held the wand up. "Now, do you want this back or not?"

"Yes," Yukari said.

"Do you promise not to attack Moka again?"

"I promise, now give me back my wand."

"Here then," he handed it over to her. "But you had better keep your promise."

Bam!

"Ow!" Naruto rubbed the top of his head as he watched Yukari run away.

"I never said I wouldn't hurt you, you big jerk!" Yukari quickly fled from sight.

"Are you all right?" Moka asked.

"I'll live."

"Do you think you were a little hard on her?"

He looked at Moka in surprise. "She outed me as a ninja for her own selfish reasons and then she attacked you just because you're a vampire. How should I have treated her?"

"She didn't attack me because I'm a vampire; she attacked me because she thought I was standing in her way."

"And that's better? She's trying to keep me from being with you."

"Naruto-kun that girl has probably been treated as an outcast since she was five. She's probably very lonely and is just desperate to have a friend. Witches are a rare breed and before meeting you I had never heard of ninjas. Except maybe for her family you may be the *only* person she has ever met who is like her. Do you really blame her for going a little overboard trying to make you like her? You said it yourself Naruto-kun," she spoke quietly. "It's terrible being all alone."

Yukari ran as fast as she could while trying to hold back her tears. *Idiot, idiot, idiot why did I think he would understand? He's just a fool! He'll probably end up being that vampire's pet! I'm glad he doesn't like me, it's fine.* She reached up to wipe away her tears. *I'm used to being alone.*

Running and wiping her eyes she ran into someone. She stumbled and the wand fell from her grasp.

"Hey! Watch where you're going!" A tall dark haired boy hissed.

"I'm very sorry." Yukari reached to get her wand but another boy grabbed it instead. "Hey give that back!"

"What are you doing in that ridiculous outfit?" The first boy asked. "You're supposed to wear the school uniform just like everyone else."

"What do you think you're too good to follow the rules like the rest of us?" A third boy asked.

"Stupid half breed probably does think the rules don't apply to her." A fourth boy said. Yukari suddenly found herself surrounded by four angry boys who were a lot bigger than she was.

"It's nothing like that," she explained. "I just think I look cute this way."

"Well I think you look like an ugly witch." The original boy said.

Yukari tried to hide the fact she was afraid. She knew no one would put their neck out to help someone like her. And without her wand she was just an ordinary eleven year old human girl. "Please just give me my wand."

The boy with the wand handed it to the first boy. "You mean this wand? Sure I'll give it back to you." He held it out over his head in front of her. "All you have to do is just take it."

She was being humiliated and there was nothing she could do about it. Things never changed.

From behind there was a blur as a figure leapt up and over him and snatched the wand from his hand. Naruto landed on his feet next to Yukari and handed her back her wand. "Here you go."

"Who are you?" The first boy demanded to know.

"He's another damn half breed like the witch." One of the other boys said.

"Actually I'm a ninja, and I'm also," he put a hand on Yukari's shoulder. "Yukari's friend, if you're going to mess with her you'll be messing with me too."

"And with me." Moka stepped between two of the boys and also put a hand on Yukari's other shoulder.

The first boy stared uncomprehendingly at Moka. "You, you're not a half breed like these two. Why are you siding with them?"

"I will always stand up for and protect the people who are my friends. And even if they were strangers, what you are doing here is wrong. It doesn't take any courage to bully someone who is weaker than you."

The boy looked angry, but he could see a crowd gathering around him and his friends. People might stand by to watch a couple half breeds get beaten, but there would be a riot if he touched the academy beauty. He looked at his friends. "Let's go, the smell here is starting to make me sick."

As the four boys left Yukari turned gratefully to Naruto and Moka. "I... I thought you didn't like me."

"Well," Naruto said. "To be honest I don't like people trying to force things on me, but I do know what it's like to be all alone. It can make you do desperate things." He smiled down at her. "Now I'm afraid I can't be your boyfriend, but I can be your friend. You don't have to be alone anymore."

"And I would also like to be your friend Yukari-san." Moka said. "I've also known what it's like to be alone, and I would never let anyone suffer that."

"You... you really mean all that?" Both of them nodded. "Naruto, I am very sorry for the trouble I've caused you and I promise that from now on I'll always try to help you in any way I can."

"I'm very glad to hear that."

Yukari looked up at Moka. "I'm very sorry for all the mean things I said about you, I take them all back."

"That's all right," Moka said.

"And also," she suddenly leapt up and glomped onto her chest, her hands clinging tightly to Moka's breasts. "I LOVE YOU!!

"What?!" A stunned Naruto could only stare, unable to move.

"Iyaa!" Moka cried out and began flailing her arms about as Yukari continued to hang on.

"I love you and I love Naruto! Let's move in together and share one big bed!"

That was way too much and poor Naruto immediately passed out.

After finally convincing Yukari that no one would be sharing anyone's bed the three of them had gone to dinner at a dorm cafeteria. (Need it even be mentioned that Moka once again turned Naruto's neck into a juice box?) The three of them sat together and talked for awhile getting to know each other. Unfortunately even though it was only the first day of class they had been loaded down with homework. Naruto turned down Yukari's kind offer to do it for him and he headed back to his room.

Well this has sure been an interesting day. I'm glad it's over. He opened the door to his room and switched on the light.

"Hello darling, I'm so glad we can finally be alone."

Naruto froze. There lying on his sleeping mat was the beautiful and buxom Kurumu. And she was wearing nothing but a sheer black teddy and some black lace panties. The teddy was so thin he had no trouble at all seeing the shape of what was hidden underneath.

I can see her boobies!! His poor teenage mind screamed. He was completely stunned and didn't know what to do. So he said the first thing that popped into his mind. "I really like your boobs." *NO! I did not just say that!* Somehow he was sure that if he'd said something like that to Moka he'd have gotten slapped. If he'd said it to her vampire form he probably would have gotten stomped into jelly.

Kurumu immediately sat up and laughed. "Yahoo! I knew you would!" She began to shake her chest back and forth for his pleasure.

As much as he was enjoying what he was seeing Naruto shut his eyes for a moment and tried to get his raging hormones under control. He was after all a fifteen year old boy, which meant that hormones made up roughly half his body weight. "Uhm, how did you get in here? I thought girls weren't allowed past the ground floor."

"I flew in through the window." She nodded to her school uniform that was neatly folded by the bed. "Now why don't you come here and sit next to me darling?"

He opened his eyes again. Using all the discipline he'd learned from Iruka he managed to gain a little self control. "Ah, what are you doing here?"

She smiled and stretched her back a bit. "Isn't it obvious? I've decided not to fool around. This is the ultimate Succubus seduction technique. You should feel honored; it usually wouldn't take more than a glance for me to make you mine. But you resisted my charm so I was required to take more drastic measures."

"What does this, 'ultimate technique' involve?"

She laughed and began running a hand along her creamy thigh. "About what you'd expect, what you'd hope for, I'm going to give you my body."

"Give... me your... your body?" He immediately slammed his hands together. "Kai!"

She stared at him. "What are you doing?"

Seeing nothing had changed he grinned at her sheepishly. "Ah, sorry, I thought this might be a genjutsu."

"What's a genjutsu?"

"Ah, it's an illusion. I've never even had a date or kissed a girl. So to have a beautiful girl just show up in my room offering me... well, I figured it couldn't be real."

Smiling she licked her lips. "Well, lucky you it's real. We'll spend the whole night making love. I'm real flexible so you can bend me any way you want. We can do anything your twisted little mind can dream up, I won't say no. I'll give you pleasure like you've never even dreamed of. And come the morning it'll be my name on your lips, I'll give you such a wondrous night you'll never want anyone else but me in your bed. Now," she patted the spot next to her. "Come here darling and we'll begin."

He just stared at her. *A beautiful sexy girl with huge boobs is lying in front of me offering to have kinky sex all night with me. And the weirdest part about all this? It's what I'm about to say.*

"I think you should leave."

Kurumu's jaw literally dropped. "Wha... what did you just say?"

Naruto gulped. "I said that you should leave."

She simply sat there and stared at him for a moment. "Leave?" She stood up. "You want me to leave? Is that what you want?" Her voice

was low but it was quivering, her glare seemed hot enough to start fires.

His heart pounding Naruto managed a slight nod. "Uh, yeah."

"I OFFER TO FUCK YOUR BRAINS OUT AND YOU WANT ME TO LEAVE?!" She reached out and grabbed his wrists. Before he knew it she slapped both his hands on top of her breasts. "There, feel that! Don't they feel great? I've had men from eight to eighty staring at my chest wishing they could put their hands where yours are now! I could knock on any door in this entire dorm and do you think *anyone* would turn down what I just offered you?!"

Oh my Kami they feel amazing!! They're so soft and supple!! "Uh, pro... probably not."

"Then why?!" She suddenly shoved him with surprising strength, he slammed into the door. "Am I that ugly to you? Do you really hate me so much that you don't even want me to pleasure you?! What is it, tell me!"

The door had a crack running down the middle of it. Naruto carefully rubbed his hurting back while eying this furious woman standing in front of him. "It's nothing like that. You're absolutely beautiful and sexy as hell. If this were all happening a week ago I'd probably have fallen on my knees to praise Kami and then jumped you."

She glared at him. "Then why?"

"Because if I did anything with you it would feel like I was betraying Moka-chan, and I won't do anything that will hurt her."

"You won't take me because it would hurt Moka? Just what the hell is she to you?"

"She is my precious friend."

"Friend? That's all?"

"That's more than enough, she genuinely cares about me and I know how special that is."

"I can be a lot more than just a friend to you; I can be your lover."

Slowly, and regretfully, Naruto shook his head. "I won't even pretend that I'm not seriously tempted, but I can't."

She let out a ragged laugh. "Heh, do you know I'm a virgin?"

"You are?" Naruto said in honest surprise. The way she'd been acting certainly hadn't been his idea of a virgin's behavior.

"That's right, up until now I have never even kissed a boy. I've always managed just on my charm. I've studied my race's techniques but I had never put any of them into practice. You were going to be my first; I was going to give you my virginity. And... and you rejected me so you could stay *friends* with Moka."

"I am sorry, it's just..." he heard a sudden tearing sound and saw two bat like wings sprout out of her back. Her finger nails grew and turned into foot long claws.

"I AM SERIOUSLY PISSED OFF NOW!!" She came at him with those claws. In the confined space he was just able to dodge her. He saw her claws slice clean through the wooden door reducing it to kindling.

"Let's take this outside." He would need room and performed a quick substitution.

Seeing him disappear and be replaced by a log she was determined not to let him get away. She smashed through the window not bothering to open it or to put on her school uniform.

Circling above she scanned the grounds below. "Where are you?! I am so going to kill you!"

Watching while remaining carefully hidden behind a large tree Naruto waited for her to move off. *Geez, she's not exactly subtle is she?* Eventually she moved in a different direction to continue her search. Along with kunai Naruto kept all his ninja gear hidden on his person. He quickly set to work. He knew he could have gone to the girl's dorm to get help from Moka or Yukari, but he figured that as a ninja he ought to be able to handle some fights on his own.

He had humiliated and crushed her. *Leave, he actually told me to leave! I offer him this amazing body and he turns me down! I won't let him humiliate me like this!* She banked back around to continue her search, and as she did so she finally spotted her prey. He was standing right out in the open behind two large trees.

Seeing her he actually waved and shouted to her. "If you really want me I'm right here. I won't run from this spot."

"Fine I guess you really want to die then!" She dove straight for him. As she neared she had to admit that he at least had courage, or a death wish. He was standing rooted to the spot, not even trying to run or dodge. And just as she was almost on top of him the moon came out from behind some clouds, its light made a bunch of little lines running between the two trees sparkle. *Is that wire?* By the time she spotted it, it was much too late to avoid his trap. She flew straight into the wire, the lines snapped off the trees and quickly wrapped around her pinning her arms and wings to her body. She screamed as she crashed down to earth.

When the dust finally settled she looked up to see Naruto calmly standing over her with some kind of knife in one hand. She flopped about like a fish on a hook, but the more she struggled the tighter the wire seemed to bind her.

"Don't bother," Naruto told her. "Thin as it is that's ninja wire, it's as strong as steel."

Seeing as she couldn't get loose she stopped struggling and glared up at him. "When I get out of this I am still going to kill you."

"Really? Then I guess I had better finish you off now while I can." Saying so he knelt down over her with his knife, he looked very serious.

"Wha... what? You wouldn't kill a girl would you? Especially not a helpless one."

Naruto shook his head. "You *really* have no idea what a ninja is do you? A ninja is always ready to kill when necessary regardless of the situation."

She stared at the strange knife he held. "You... you're really going to kill me?"

"Why shouldn't I? You attacked me without warning and now you're telling me that you'll come after me again if I let you go. You really aren't leaving me with many options are you?"

She began to cry. "I'm sorry! Pleeeeease don't kill me!" She wailed.

"O.k, o.k. just promise you'll stop attacking me and I'll let you go."

She looked at him hopefully through her tears. "Really? You're not going to hurt me?"

Naruto shook his head. "I haven't killed anyone... yet. I'm sure I'll have to one day. And somehow I get this feeling it may be someday soon. But I'd rather not have my very first victim be a beautiful girl who wanted to sleep with me."

Despite being bound and helpless it still pleased her to hear him say that. "Do you really think I'm beautiful?"

"Of course! Like I said if I'd met you a week ago... Anyway, will you promise not to attack me or any of my friends?"

"I won't, I swear it."

Naruto knew it was a risk, but he was sure that deep down Kurumu had not actually been malicious. He did not want to hurt her or get her into trouble. With a few flicks of his wrist he cut the wire with his kunai.

Despite being free she made no effort to stand up. "I guess I'm going to be the laughing stock of the academy tomorrow." She said dejectedly.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm a succubus; I'm supposed to be irresistible to men. When everyone hears about how you rejected me I'll be a joke."

"Why would they find out? We're the only ones who know what happened and I won't say anything."

She looked at him in sudden hope and surprise. "But don't you want to tell everyone about this?"

"Nope, I promise I won't tell anyone. I won't do anything that hurts you"

I actually believe him. She felt her face get hot and her heart began beating faster. "Thank you Naruto-kun."

He smiled at her. "You're welcome Kurumu-chan," he brought his hands together to make some signs. "Well good night."

"Wait!"

"What?"

She looked down a bit embarrassed. "Uh, could you please walk me back to my dorm?"

"You're not going to fly?"

"My wings are kind of tired."

"Well if you want I can jutsu both of us..."

"Your jutsu, ah, kind of scares me. Could you just walk me back to my dorm please? I would really appreciate it."

"Well, o.k. I guess, but here," he pulled off his school jacket and handed it to her. "Put this on."

She gratefully put on his jacket and then took a hold of his arm as they walked back together,

The next morning Moka and Yukari were outside the main entrance of Naruto's dorm waiting for him. As they stood there they heard the boys buzzing about last nights events.

"Did you hear? That weird half breed had a girl in his room last night."

"No way!"

"I swear. I'm on the third floor, I heard a girl screaming. And his door was destroyed and his room messed up."

Since they knew Naruto was the only, 'half breed' staying at the dorm they were both wondering about what they were hearing.

"Do you suppose..." Moka asked nervously.

"No way!" Yukari said firmly. "Naruto would never have a girl in his room, unless it were us!"

Before long Naruto finally appeared. He was looking a bit different this morning. His school jacket was missing and along with his back pack for his books he had a small plastic bag.

"Good morning!" Moka chirped happily.

Good morning," Yukari greeted.

"Good morning," Naruto returned. Together they set out for the academy.

"Naruto-kun," Moka asked curiously. "Where is your jacket?"

"Oh, I had to loan it to someone."

"Really, who?"

"Good morning Naruto-kun!" A girl's voice sang out. He three of them looked up to see Kurumu approaching them. She handed him a jacket. "I wanted to return this, I cleaned it for you. Thank you for lending it to me."

"No problem," taking and putting his jacket on he handed her the plastic bag he was carrying. "Here are the clothes you left in my room."

Nani?! Moka thought but was too stunned to say anything.

"Arigato," Kurumu held out a plate to him. "I made some cookies, would you like to eat them with me?"

"Thanks," he took one. "Mmmm chocolate chip, my favorite."

Kurumu laughed happily. "Yahoo, I'll make them for you whenever you want Naruto-kun. Please think of it as a way to say thank you for not hurting me when you had me tied up and helpless."

Tied up and helpless?! Moka's face was going red as she imagined various scenarios.

"You know Naruto-kun there is something very important you should know. I have an important mission I must perform on behalf of my race. We succubus must go through a great many men in order to find our destined one. The one we will spend our lives with and have

a family with." She began to blush heavily. "After last night, I've decided it's you."

"What?" he began to cough as he choked on a cookie.

"So when do you want to get married?" Kurumu asked happily.

Bam!

"Ow!" Kurumu rubbed the top of her head after having a pot fall on it.

"Naruto-kun would never want a big breasted sow like you!" Yukari said angrily "He's going to marry Moka and then eventually when I'm older they'll invite me into their bed and the three of us will be very happy! Right Naruto-kun?"

"Didn't we talk about this yesterday? There is no way..."

Moka suddenly grabbed his arm. "Naruto-kun what is this girl to you?! What exactly happened last night?"

"Well you see..."

After taking Yukari's wand and tossing it Kurumu grabbed his other arm, pressing her breasts eagerly against it. "Darling would you prefer a big fancy wedding or an intimate little ceremony? Because I am fine with either."

"Let go of him Naruto-kun is mine!" Moka said desperately. "Naruto please say something!"

He glanced down at his wrist watch. "Will you look at the time? I've got to go."

"Hey..."

"Don't..."

Despite having the two girls hanging on to him he managed to slip loose just long enough to perform a couple hand signs and disappear, a log, 'poofing' into his place.

The two girls looked glumly at one another. "Does he do that a lot?" Kurumu asked.

"I'm afraid so." Moka said.

Club activities

Though it took quite a lot of explaining Naruto was eventually able to convince a relieved Moka that despite the circumstances nothing had happened between him and Kurumu. With that the following two weeks began to settle into a comfortable routine.

"Can I?" Moka asked.

Naruto sighed. "Sure." With that she eagerly bit down on his neck. About thirty seconds later she let go, obviously looking content.

"That is soooo good! Your blood is better than any gourmet meal."

Naruto began to rub the bruise on his neck. "I'm glad you like it."

With that she took a hold of his arm and the two of them began heading towards school arm in arm. As they walked Moka's eyes darted about looking for any sudden ambush from a certain blue haired succubus.

As they walked Naruto felt the morning sunlight on his face. His first few days at the academy had left him thinking the sun would never come out. The days seemed perpetually overcast and gloomy. But he had begun to notice that the sun did come out, though it remained overcast most of the time. Realizing this something occurred to him.

"Sunlight doesn't hurt you does it?"

Moka looked at him in surprise. "Well because I'm so pale I tend to sunburn easily, but otherwise no."

"I just realized that you're not really much like the vampires I've read about. Though of course you do drink blood and are affected by crosses." He thought for a moment. "Do you not cast a reflection in a mirror?"

She gave an amused smile. "That's silly, how could I put my makeup on without a mirror?"

"Does garlic repel you?"

She made a face. "I have a very strong sense of smell so I don't like it much."

"Would a stake through your heart kill you?"

"Uh, wouldn't that kill anyone?"

"Can you turn into a bat?"

She just laughed. "Where do you get this stuff from?"

"They're from the stories I've read or movies I've seen."

She shook her head. "When I was in the human world I read some of those same stories. Humans don't know anything about vampires. Most of what's written about us is pure fantasy."

"What about not being able to cross running water?"

"Hmmm, well water is one of my weaknesses. If I'm surrounded by water it drains away my strength."

"What about being undead?"

She suddenly came to a halt. "Undead?" She reached up and gently pressed a hand to Naruto's cheek. "Is my touch cold Naruto-kun?"

The feel of her fingertips and the familiarity of her words made his cheeks darken a bit. "Ac... actually you feel pretty warm."

Gently stroking his cheek she began to lean in close to him. "I am very much among the living Naruto-kun. I hunger and I thirst and I feel, I am very much among the living."

As she was leaning into him he was slowly leaning down towards her. She smelled of strawberries and her scent seemed to fill his entire world.

"Moka-chan..." he slipped both arms around her.

"Naruto-kun..." her lips were trembling as their faces neared one another.

"Morning Naruto-kun!" Out of nowhere Kurumu leapt into him. She eagerly took hold of his face and tried to smother him with her chest.

It was the start to another day.

Nekonome-sensei turned around again to give her homeroom class a look of exasperation. Whenever she turned towards the blackboard they all started giggling. "What is so funny?" she demanded.

As one the class answered in a chorus. "Nothing sensei!"

She gave up and shook her head. "Anyway, I want to remind you all that since we are trying to mimic the experiences of a human high school that includes club activities. Participation in at least one club is mandatory. After class the various clubs will be having their recruitment drives. I encourage all of you to find a club that suits you. And please also be sure to check the newspaper club which I happen to be faculty advisor on."

She turned towards the blackboard exposing the sign on her back that read, 'pull my tail.' (Despite being part of the faculty her human image was less than perfect and an orange cat like tail would often appear.) The class began laughing.

Moka looked over at Naruto. "You're awful."

He gave her a hurt expression. "Awww, Moka-chan it was just too easy, I couldn't resist." The master prankster had been feeling bored.

Pranks were not only fun they provided good practice in stealth.

Seeing his expression she couldn't help but giggle a bit before continuing. "Naruto-kun, what kind of club do you think we should join?"

He smiled, pleased not only that she would automatically declare they would join the same club, but also with the fact that she was willing to leave the choice up to him. The truth was every minute he got to spend with Moka made him feel like the luckiest guy in the world, and getting to spend time with her mattered more than anything else. Still... "Well Moka-chan, if you don't object I already know which club I want to join."

Following classes the academy's vast foyer was packed by dozens of tables and stalls representing the various clubs. Moka being the great beauty of the freshman class many of them were eager to try and recruit her. The phantom photography club wanted her to become a model for them. The chemistry club wanted her to join promising to make lots of love potions together. Just about every club that spotted her tried to entice her to join, but Naruto made sure to keep them moving.

"Hello," a beautiful girl with a bikini top and a sarong called. "Why don't we swim together?" Unlike all the other clubs her focus was actually on him.

"Ah, well..." Naruto began hesitantly.

"No," Moka said and this time she was the one to lead them away. When they were out of earshot she turned to Naruto apologetically. "I'm sorry, but I can't join the swim club."

Naruto nodded, she had told him that water was a weakness for her. "Not a problem, *this* is the club I wanted to join." He brought them to a table with two men sitting there.

"You want to join the martial arts club?"

"You bet!" He said eagerly. "When my sensei was still living with me he taught me all the basics of the ninja fighting style called taijutsu. But when he left I didn't have anyone to train or spar with, so I wound up taking lessons in all different fighting styles. Tokyo has a lot of different martial arts schools so it wasn't hard. I am a black belt in karate, and I have also studied judo, tae kwon do, savate, and boxing."

The two men sitting at the table were both wearing white tokaido martial arts uniforms. One was a pretty big fellow who had an eye patch and a crazy hair style, he had a black belt. His much smaller companion had an unhappy look on his face and a brown belt.

"A black belt?" The large one with the eye patch said. "Is that true or are you just trying to impress the lady?"

Naruto frowned at him. "I wouldn't make something like that up."

The fellow smiled at him. "Well, we'll find out soon enough. If you join the martial arts club the very first thing you'll do is fight me so I can gage your ability and assign you your position within the club. I should warn you though; we take our training very seriously."

"Sounds good to me!" Naruto said.

"I want to join too!" Moka said.

"Me too!" Kurumu said popping out of nowhere.

"Oh and me I want to join!" Yukari suddenly appeared.

The second fellow at the table suddenly began to smile. "We're going to have girls in our club!"

The larger fellow gave him an amused look. "Take it easy Taro." He then looked at the women. "Have any of you had any training in any of the fighting forms?"

All three shook their heads. Yukari relied solely on magic and so had never learned how to fight. Moka actually had more fighting experience than anyone present, but those abilities were locked away with her other psyche. As for Kurumu...

"Are you kidding? Do you think I'd ever have to fight with a body like this?" She bounced up and down a little.

"I see your point!" Taro said happily.

The other fellow shook his head slightly. "My name is Zarak Kenpachi; you can refer to me as Kenpachi-sempai. I am the leader of the martial arts club and you ladies are welcome to join so long as you understand you'll be expected to work hard on developing your fighting skills. We study the human fighting arts in order to be better able to defend ourselves when we must be in human form, as well as to improve our fighting ability when in our true form. If any of you plan on joining just to take it easy you can forget it. Ours is a demanding club and I won't put up with slackers."

"Don't worry we'll definitely be able to handle whatever you can dish out!" Naruto said excitedly. He loved hard training and he loved anything to do with fighting. Kenpachi and his club sounded like a dream come true.

The girls were less sure, especially Kurumu and Yukari, but they all nodded. Seeing Naruto's enthusiasm they were ready to at least try.

"All right then," Kenpachi said. "Welcome to the martial arts club. We meet for one hour each day after class and for six hours each Saturday. Report to room 121 tomorrow after class and we'll begin your initiation."

The next day the four of them came to room 121. It was a large single room that had been converted over to a dojo. The room was located near the gym and so they were able to use the locker rooms to change into their white tokaido martial arts uniforms. There were a

total of five members. Besides Kenpachi's black belt and Taro's brown two members wore green belts and one blue.

"Now then," Kenpachi strode to the middle of the room. "I'm going to test each of you to determine your position." He grinned at Naruto. "Let's start with you Mr. I am a black belt. The rules are simple; all you have to do is come at me as hard as you can. I won't do anything but defend myself."

"O.k.!" Naruto needed no more invitation than that. He launched himself at Kenpachi with a swift series of kicks and punches. Almost immediately a look of real surprise filled the man's face. It was replaced almost as quickly by one of pleasure as he had to work to keep from being struck. Naruto was surprised that for such a big fellow Kenpachi was also very fast and light on his feet. He had expected at least a few of his opening series of attacks to get through but they'd all been blocked.

To those watching the display of speed and power was impressive even without any hits being scored. To the original members of the club it was especially impressive as they could recognize Naruto's skill as above that of anyone but Kenpachi's.

"Yahoo! Go Naruto!" Kurumu cheered loudly.

"Yeah, do your best Naruto-kun" Moka shouted while Yukari whistled and yelled.

While this was going on Naruto was quickly realizing he was never going to get through relying solely on speed. So he decided to try a well disguised feint. He came at Kenpachi again as though aiming for a jab at his chest. He kept his moves consistent with a jab but the last possible second twisted on his right foot and brought his left leg around for a kick. Kenpachi saw it and dropped his left arm to block, but not quite fast enough. Naruto's foot landed a clean hit on his lower ribs.

He wasn't sure how much of a victory it was, he felt as though he had just kicked a brick wall. It reminded him of Saizou in monster form, the difference here being of course that Kenpachi was still in his human form. Naruto might have been unsure if getting in one hit was any sort of accomplishment, but hearing all the club members suddenly gasp made him suspect it might be. Kenpachi's reaction was also noteworthy, he began laughing.

"All right, all right," he held up his hands. "You've convinced me, you're a black belt. And since you are that automatically makes you number two in the club and my lieutenant, congratulations!" He slapped a hand down on Naruto's shoulder and Naruto only just managed not to fall over.

"What?" Taro shouted in disbelief. "But Kenpachi-sempai I'm your lieutenant! How can you put someone who just showed up ahead of me?"

Kenpachi frowned at him. "Easy, he's better than you. In two years you haven't managed to hit me even once, he managed it his very first time out. You know the rules, skill is the only thing that counts and he's got better skills."

Hearing praise Naruto smiled and drank it in; completely missing the dark look Taro sent his way.

Moka noticed it.

"All right, let's have the pink haired girl go next."

Moka did her best; she attacked earnestly and with greater physical power than Naruto. But in her current form she lacked the necessary experience or ferocity to be any sort of threat. Kenpachi was not impressed and called a halt to the match after two minutes. "Yellow belt," he declared. "That's one step above untrained apprentice. Blue haired girl it's your turn."

"Yahoo! Prepare to face the most awesome Succubus technique."
She took a spot five feet in front of him... and began doing a series of jumping jacks.

Kenpachi just stared at her. "What the hell are you doing girl? This is the martial arts club not the calisthenics club."

"Ha! No man can resist this powerful technique!"

"Soooo amazing," Taro said in a half dazed voice. The other members murmured their agreement as none of them could look away.

Kenpachi shook his head in disgust. "White belt," he said.

"Is that good?" Kurumu asked.

"It's the lowest possible rank reserved for the untrained, now the little girl."

"But..." Kurumu started to argue but a glare from Kenpachi was enough to quiet her down.

Never one for confrontations without her wand Yukari stepped forward timidly. She just stood there, all four and a half feet of her staring up at the near seven feet of her opponent.

"Well? Are you going to attack me?"

"I'd really rather not." Yukari admitted.

Kenpachi sighed. "White belt."

Most of the remainder of the hour was spent going over the club rules and showing the new member a few basic exercises. Heading back to the dorms with Moka, Naruto was in fine spirits.

"I'm really glad we joined them aren't you Moka-chan?"

She answered warily. "I am glad you're happy Naruto-kun, but I don't like the way Taro-san was looking at you."

Naruto shrugged. "Well I took his spot; you can't really blame him for being mad. I'm sure he'll get over it."

"Let's hope so," she said quietly.

Along with home room Naruto and Moka shared the first and last class of the day. Moka really liked that arrangement since it meant she could be with Naruto from the beginning of the last class through to the end of the day. So she was a bit surprised when on the following day she spotted Naruto heading in the opposite direction as the last class was about to start. She tried to call out to him but he didn't hear her.

Naruto entered room 121 to find Taro waiting for him. "What's so important that it couldn't wait until after class?"

Taro glared at him and Naruto immediately understood this had nothing to do with the club. "O.k., let me guess, you're mad that I took your spot and you want to fight me over it?"

"Mad doesn't begin to describe it half breed. I worked for two years to earn my place as Kenpachi-sempai's lieutenant and you just waltz in here and snatch it away from me in a day? You really think I'll let one of your kind just take what's mine?"

"O.k. first off I didn't set off to take anything from you or anyone else. All I'm trying to do is find my own place. I was told to fight as hard as I could and that's what I did. The skills I have were earned from years of sweat and commitment and I don't apologize for them."

"You arrogant piece of crap, thinking you could ever measure up to a true monster. I'll show you what all your skill is worth." His shape

began to expand as his school uniform tore apart. Taro transformed into a creature that half bull half man, a minotaur.

"Uhm, don't the club rules require all fights to be in human form? Never mind that you're also breaking the school rules."

"I don't give a damn about the rules," Taro snorted. "All I care about is proving to Kenpachi-sempai who truly deserves to be his second in command."

Naruto took out his kunai seeing as this was not going to just be a spar. "So let me just get this straight, you're ready to break the school rules and murder me all so you can be the number two man in a club with a total of nine members? And if you kill me it'll be down to eight. Doesn't that seem a little extreme to you?"

"Shut up!" Taro roared and charged at him with his head lowered.

"Good answer," Naruto quickly side stepped and dodged avoiding Taro just as he might have a charging bull. As he went past Taro swiped at him with an arm. It smacked him on the back and sent him tumbling to the ground.

"Naruto-kun!" A girl's voice shouted from the door.

As he got back to his feet he looked up to see Moka hurrying to him. "Moka-chan what are you doing here?"

"When I saw you heading in this direction instead of towards class I guessed where you were coming. Quick pull my rosary off so I can help you, I can't remove it myself." She was surprised when instead of doing that Naruto shook his head.

"Moka-chan get out of here I'll handle this."

"What?"

"Listen to him girl, I really like you and don't want you to be hurt along with the half breed." He lowered his head and charged again.

Naruto leapt away from her to make sure Moka was not accidentally in danger. Taro raced towards him aiming his two horns at the middle of Naruto's chest. Naruto stood his ground. At the last possible instant he sidestepped the horns and lashed out with a kunai for he opponent's neck. The blade struck its target but did not cut. Meanwhile Taro was able to lash out with his right arm and catch him. Naruto was sent flying into the far wall.

"Naruto-kun!" Moka quickly got to his side.

With a slight grunt he got back to his feet. "I'm all right."

"Naruto-kun let me help you!"

He shook his head. "I can't depend on others to fight for me Moka-chan; I need to fight my own battles."

Frowning she grabbed his hand. "I don't care about that." Before he realized it she brought it up to her chest. His fingers entangled with the rosary and it popped off immediately.

The entire room seemed to be filled with demonic aura and power as Moka transformed into her true vampiric form. Taro stood where he was frozen in terror at the sight of an actual vampire.

"Well then," Moka teased. "Aren't you going to attack me?"

"Uh, I... I... really don... don't want to fi... fight you."

"No, you only wish to attack those you think weaker. What one would expect from a pathetic little coward." In a heartbeat she crossed the distance between them and struck the side of his head with a vicious and perfectly delivered kick. One of his horns broke off as he was sent crashing to the floor beaten and unconscious. "Know your place!"

As she walked back over to him Naruto felt embarrassed at again having to be saved. "Thanks Moka-chan, I..." He never even saw

her hand as she slapped him. She hit him a lot harder than Taro had and he found himself back on the floor staring up at her angry face. "What... what was that for?" He began to rub a very sore cheek.

"Do not refer to me in such a familiar manner Uzumaki Naruto; you have not earned that right!" She said angrily. "I am not the same as the other sentimental Moka."

He slowly nodded. "I apologize, uh, Moka-san."

She crossed her arms over her chest. "Why did you refuse my aid Uzumaki Naruto?"

"Because a ninja should not rely on any one else's strength."

"You are a fool Uzumaki Naruto. It does not lessen you to accept help from others. And did it not occur to you what would have happened if the other Moka had seen you seriously hurt or even killed after refusing her help? To the other Moka there is nothing more precious than you. Were she to lose you her heart would shatter."

It would? Naruto thought. *Am I really that important to her?*

Moka spotted the rosary and picked it up from the floor. "You claim to care about the other Moka. If that is so then remember what I have said to you today, and know your place." She put the rosary back on the end of her chain. The power drained from her and she became an unconscious teenage Moka. Naruto had to jump up to catch her before she fell.

When Naruto reported the attack by Taro he was rather surprised to learn his punishment would only be a two weeks suspension. Kenpachi didn't even throw him out of the club, though he did promise to demote him to white belt. Apparently in the supernatural world violence was far more accepted than in the human one.

Following a rather abbreviated club session he and Moka headed back to the dorms. Unlike their normal routine they were not walking arm in arm and there was an awkward silence between them.

Finally as they were almost back Naruto spoke up and asked something that had been on his mind.

"Moka-chan?"

"Yes?"

"Do you, uhm, remember the things your other self does?"

She slowly nodded. "Yes I do, and I am very sorry that she slapped you Naruto-kun."

"No, I guess I deserved it. I'm the one who should be apologizing. I'm sorry I refused your help. I guess I'm just not used to having people I can trust."

She stopped and reached out to take a hold of his hand. "Naruto-kun, I will always be there to help you when you need me."

He gave her hand a gentle squeeze. "Thanks Moka-chan," he hesitated for just a bit. "Say Moka-chan there was something I was wondering about. Before I get ready for class I like to do some training, and it would really help me if I had a training and sparring partner. If it's not asking too much would you like to join me?"

She slowly gave him a shy smile. "I'd be happy to."

"Thank you Moka-chan," he carefully slipped his fingers between hers and they began to walk hand in hand. "And just so you know," he said quietly. "If anything ever happened to you my heart would shatter too."

Her face turned a deep red and she had to look away. But hearing him say that made her feel very, very happy.

A present for Naruto

Author's Note: First I want to thank all of you for the good reception this story has received. Please continue to read and review and I will continue to try and make this worthy of your time. As I am sure all of you who are familiar with Rosario Vampire now know this will not just be a retelling with Naruto taking on the main role. I intend for this to be a very unique story using the characters of Naruto and Rosario and mostly using the Rosario setting. (Please note I said mostly.) And that does mean that some of the Naruto characters will appear.

More than a few of you are eager to see the Kyuubi. Please be patient, I already have the moment of his arrival well planned (heh, heh, heh) but it may take awhile. I plan for this to be a pretty long and detailed story.

For those of you who are Bleach fans yes, it is THAT Kenpachi. He looks the same and has the same basic attitude, but is NOT a shinigami. Some of you who have read some of my other stories, especially the Invitation series, know I like to toss in the names of Bleach characters. Using Kenpachi was too good pass up.

He finished up his breakfast in the dorm cafeteria and headed out. Just like always there was a small crowd of boys just outside the entrance. Just like always as soon as he appeared there was a joyful shout of good morning and Moka coming over to take a hold of his arm and begin the walk to the academy. Just like always the other boys stared at the two of them in jealousy and incomprehension.

This wasn't the first time they'd gotten together this morning, they'd spent an hour together working out and sparring. Naruto actually thought she looked even cuter in her grey T shirt and shorts, even without her make up. Some girls were just naturally beautiful he supposed.

"I'm really famished," she said to him. "So can I?"

"Sure," he said to her.

She eagerly leaned in to bite him and have her morning meal. The pain of her bite was slight and after a month he was used to it. But this time...

"Ow!" As she let go there much sharper pain. Naruto slapped a hand to his neck and was very surprised to feel something warm and sticky. "You left a wound this time!"

"I'm so sorry! Here let me help." She pressed a handkerchief to the small wound to stop the flow of delicious blood.

"You've never left a wound before."

"Sorry, I'm really sorry; I guess I got a little over enthusiastic." She pulled back her handkerchief. "The bleeding has stopped."

"Ah, it's all right, just be more careful o.k.?"

"Sure!" She reached up to the back of his head and he felt a sudden painful yank as some of his hair was torn out.

"Ow! Ow!" He stared at her. "Moka what are you doing?!"

"Grey hair," she explained.

He stared at her. "Please stop causing me bodily harm Moka-chan."

"Sorry," she put her arm back around his. (He watched warily to make sure she didn't suddenly start scratching him.) "Now you are still coming to my room Saturday to study with me right?"

He grinned; normally they studied together in the library. But Moka had suddenly invited him to study with her in her dorm room, *alone*. "Are you kidding? I wouldn't miss it, even if it is October tenth."

"Oh? Is there something special about October tenth?" Moka asked as they were walking again.

"It's... it's a day of mourning for me, normally I would just spend it alone."

"Really?" He thought she sounded a bit surprised. "That's awful Naruto-kun, who are you mourning?"

He hesitated, but went ahead and answered. "My parents," he said quietly. "But I mourn that day for other reasons too."

She was curious to know more, despite all their time together she knew almost nothing about his past. But she could sense that that this was not a subject he wanted to talk about. So she just walked with him for a ways in a comfortable silence. She spoke again as they approached the academy. "Oh could you please tell Kenpachi-sensei that Yukari and I won't be attending the club events today? We both have some tasks we have to take care of that can't wait. We'll both probably be gone until tomorrow."

"What do you mean gone?" He asked her nervously. "Where are you going and why didn't you mention anything earlier?"

"Oh it's no big deal," she patted his arm reassuringly. "We just have to leave the academy to get some things."

"Wait! You're leaving the academy? I thought that wasn't allowed until we graduated."

"We aren't allowed to go to the *human* world until we graduate. But there are other worlds, other places, where we are free to visit." She didn't mention that Yukari *was* going to the human world. She had been granted special permission to do so since that was where her parents resided. "Anyway we'll both be back some time tomorrow."

Following her last class she said goodbye to Naruto and hurried out to the bus stop where Yukari was already waiting.

"Hey Moka," the young witch chirped. "Are you ready to get Naruto's presents?"

From out of her jacket pocket she took out a ziplock bag with a few items inside. "I sure am! We'll give Naruto-kun the best birthday ever!"

One Week Earlier

Kurumu was eying Moka and Yukari suspiciously. "All right Moka why did you invite me to your room? What is this about?"

Moka smiled happily. "Since Naruto considers you a friend I just thought I'd ask you if you'd like to help us throw him a birthday party."

"Wait, he told you when his birthday is?" Kurumu frowned. "I asked him but he wouldn't tell me."

"Well, he wouldn't tell me either." Moka admitted.

"Then how did you find out?" Kurumu asked.

"Actually, I took care of it." Yukari said proudly. From behind her back she produced a manila folder with Naruto's name in the tab.

"You got his personnel file?!" She snatched it out of the little witch's hands. "Give me that!" She opened it up eagerly.

"Don't bother," Yukari told her. "There's nothing in there about his family or his hometown."

"There wouldn't be anything about his family." Moka said sadly. "Naruto-kun is an orphan."

"That's too bad," Kurumu said. "I would have liked to have met his parents. But at least his birthday is on here, October tenth. That's next week." *I already know exactly what to get him!*

"So will you help us give Naruto-kun the best birthday party ever?" Moka asked.

"Yahoo, of course I will. And you can leave the birthday cake and all the refreshments to me." The two other girls were both happy to agree.

"Well now that we have that out of the way." Yukari produced another folder, this one with Kurumu's name on it. "Tell me water balloon girl how did someone with so many D's even get into this academy?"

"Hey! Give me that!"

"No way you top heavy tramp." Yukari shrieked as Kurumu immediately began chasing her around Moka's apartment.

The Previous Day

"Naruto-kun, can I ask you something?"

He looked at her nervously. "You want some more blood?"

"Oh no, maybe later though." Moka said. "I was just wondering, what would you wish for if you could have anything? If you were granted just one wish and it could be anything at all what would it be?"

To go back in time and strangle the Kyuubi as he was being born down in hell. Of course he wasn't about to mention the Kyuubi to anyone, especially not to Moka. Not only was he under orders not to speak of it, but he didn't know how monsters would react to a human with a demon sealed inside of him. He certainly wasn't going to tell Moka something that might make her hate him.

"Anything at all? Even if it was something impossible?" She nodded. "Well, I guess I'd want the same thing every orphan wants, I'd want my parents."

"You're an orphan Naruto-kun?" Moka said sadly.

Naruto smiled and waved it off. "It's not a big deal Moka-chan; I accepted it a long time ago. My parents were both killed the day I was born. My village was attacked you see, and many ninja were lost. I have no living relations, or so the old Hokage told me. So I've never known what it's like to have a family."

They continued in silence for a short time as Moka pondered Naruto's wish. In her true form she had great powers, not only physical strength but other abilities as well. She also had access to other powerful beings. But what he was asking for was far beyond her ability to grant. "Would it be enough if you could just see and talk to them for a few hours?"

He laughed. "Yeah, even that would be amazing."

Naruto missed the slight nod, and if he had seen it he wouldn't have understood its meaning anyway. Moka had just decided what she was going to give him for his birthday.

Moka was the only one riding the bus now, Yukari had already gotten off at the human world.

"Have you been to the world of the Djin before?" The bus driver called.

"Yes, once with my father, a very long time ago."

"So you understand the enchantments that are a part of the land there? Even a vampire is subject to them."

"I know," Moka answered quietly.

"You should be careful, the Djin like to drive a hard bargain. Their greed is as well known as is their ability in magic."

"I'll be careful."

Through the dark tunnel they were now approaching a light. "Almost there, the enchantments will take effect as soon as you step off the bus. You're sure you don't need me to come back for you?" The bus exited the tunnel. They found themselves atop a vast plateau, miles above the ground. In the very center of the plateau was a vast settlement filled with flashing lights and raucous noise. The bus came to a halt and the door swung open.

She got up from her seat and headed towards the front of the bus. "I am sure, and thank you very much bus driver-san."

He nodded to her. "Please step off the bus carefully, and good luck finding what you're looking for."

As the bus driver had warned her the enchantments took effect the moment her feet touched the rocky ground. A powerful demonic aura surrounded her. Her body grew and matured, her hair became silver, her eyes red, and her fangs grew. She was once again her true self even though the rosary remained on her chest. She headed towards Azkarra.

Among all the worlds Azkarra was definitely one of the more unique places. It was literally a city of shops. The Djin were among the most powerful of magic users and extremely adept at all sorts of enchantments. But they were also a very clever and greedy race. They loved to make bargains and receive payments for their goods. They were notoriously hard and clever negotiators and beings of every race (including vampire) were wary of being ruined by a bargain with them. The reputation had gotten so bad the Djin had been forced to take special steps. Outside Azkarra were a series of large signs, Moka remembered them from her previous trip here. She looked over at one now.

LET NO LIE BE SPOKEN. LET NO DECEPTION STAND. LET YOUR WISH BE FULFILLED. LET THE PRICE BE PAID.

The entire race of Djin had come together and cast special enchantments on their sacred secret world that made it impossible to tell a lie or cast any type of illusion or deception. It had been necessary to convince customers to continue to visit. It was also the reason why the power of the rosary was temporarily suppressed.

Entering the city of shops she moved quickly and with purpose. Though she'd only been here once before her memory was perfect and she knew where to go. Almost every building here was identical, simple one story shops with open sides for the customers. There was the usual throng of beings from every race rushing about as available shopkeepers called out to them, eager to do business. Most of these people were idiots who had heard that the Djin could grant wishes. They were here for love potions, or to be handsome, or to become rich, or to be immortal. The idiots never seemed to worry about the price to get what they wanted. They would get what they came for; the Djin could indeed grant wishes, but it would never make them as happy as they would expect. And the price was always much higher than it seemed. A Djin could ruin you without ever speaking a lie or asking for too much.

The Djin themselves were human in appearance except for their blue skins and total lack of hair, even the women were as bald as an egg. They were materialistic and loved showing off their wealth. They wore nothing but the finest and most expensive silks and their necks and fingers were weighed down with jewelry. Some of the shopkeepers tried to call to her as she went by. She didn't bother to even acknowledge them. The people on the street fell over themselves to get out of her way. She continued to move with her long steady strides until she came to the shop she'd been looking for. There were no customers waiting and the shop keeper seemed to recognize her immediately. He was a short fat man whose neck was completely hidden under gold chains. He gave her a greasy

smile and held out his arms as though he actually expected her to embrace him.

"Well if it isn't Akashiya Moka! It's wonderful to see you again! And how is your dear father?"

She quirked an eyebrow. "My father's well being is none of your concern merchant."

Seeing her lack of warmth he lowered his arms but kept up his smile. "Now, now, no need to be hostile with poor old Melzar. Haven't I always been a good friend to your father?"

"My father deals with you when necessary only because compared to others of your kind you are a poor bargainer."

The smile slipped. "Same old Moka I see, as blunt as a cement block."

"Unlike you I have no need to pretend to anyone's friendship. You are not a friend to my father, nor are you one to me. You are nothing but a greedy merchant, the best that can be said of you is that you are often useful."

"Well I'm glad for even that much praise from you. So then, what can I do for you?"

"I require a special potion," Moka described what she wanted.

Melzar frowned. "What you want is very difficult. Not only that but for something like this I will need to use material components from the client."

She reached into her jacket and pulled out a ziplock bag. "You require blood, hair, and skin I believe? I have already collected the necessary components. Can you manufacture what I desire?"

"I can, though it won't be easy. I can probably have it ready within twelve hours." A wicked glint came into his eyes. "Shall we negotiate

the price now? Will you pay me in gold as your father does?"

"I have no gold with me."

"Then how do you wish to pay? Precious gems? Magical items? Slaves? Or do you wish to trade services?"

"Tell me," Moka eyed some of the empty vials and jars that lined some of the shop's shelves. "Which of these will you use for the potion?"

"One like this," he took a small glass vial and held it easily between thumb and forefinger.

She took the vial from him. "As payment I will fill this with my blood and give it to you."

He stared at her. Vampire blood had extraordinary healing and regenerative abilities. Using just a single drop as an ingredient he could make healing potions that could cure almost anything. What she was offering him was more valuable than a truck load of gold or a stack of diamonds. "Vampire blood is certainly valuable, but you're offering a tiny amount. I would think at least a pint..."

"Do not fool with me merchant," Moka said coolly. "We both know what I am offering you is worth dozens of these potions. If you find my offer inadequate there are a thousand other shopkeepers I can go to."

"All right, all right, I accept your offer. Will you pay me now or upon delivery?"

"Payment upon delivery is traditional, when I have the potion I will provide you with my blood."

Melzar tilted his head and looked at her speculatively. "You know Moka; you didn't strike me as the type to go so far for others. Your

father has certainly never been that way. Just what sort of *relationship* do you have with this guy?"

She narrowed her red eyes and stared at him dangerously. "That is none of your concern," she said a bit tightly. "I suggest you begin working on my order so I can leave this place as soon as possible."

"All right, all right," his body turned to blue smoke and quickly disappeared into an old brass lamp. Being powerful magic users the Djinn were able to create spacious and luxurious homes and offices in small confines like lamps, pots, or dollhouses. It was a simple trick they used to have large homes while still using all the available land in Azkarra for shops to attract customers.

Moka spent the next twelve hours standing there in front of Melzar's shop. Azkarra really was a city of nothing but shops. There were no restaurants or hotels, only shops to bargain for wishes. She grew a tad hungry but had enough self control that she didn't need to go up to one of the vast crowd and ask for a, 'bite.' She found the wait more tedious than anything else. No one approached her or tried to talk to her. It was a familiar experience; no one wanted to talk to the scary vampire. It reminded her of her upbringing and the original reason she'd left to find her mother in the first place.

At long last Melzar emerged from his lamp. When the blue smoke reformed he was holding a tiny vial with pink liquid within. "It is done," he handed the vial over to her. "Now understand I guarantee only that it will work. I promise nothing about whether or not he will enjoy the experience, he may well hate it."

She snorted. "Are you so blatantly honest with all your customers?"

"No," he said flatly. "Only with the ones who scare me, now my payment?"

She nodded and cut open a finger with one of her fangs. Her blood was a darker shade of red, almost brownish black. It was thick and flowed slowly into the vial. Melzar eyed the precious blood greedily,

already imagining just what sort of potions he would use it for. After several minutes the vial was at last full. She pressed down its stopper and handed it over to an eager Melzar.

"Always a pleasure to do business with you Moka-sama, please come again soon."

Because he was useful she gave him a polite nod and then stepped away from the shop. At her feet black fires came to life. The black flames rose and quickly seemed to consume her before disappearing from sight.

Melzar sighed, standing there in his gold chains and expensive silks. "Vampires are such show offs," he looked at his little vial and smiled. "But they do pay well."

In her apartment black flames suddenly appeared, as they died out they left behind her true form. Now that she was back the rosary's power immediately transformed her into her weaker self. She pitched forward unconscious onto her bed, the vial safely tucked away in her jacket pocket.

It would be ready for Naruto's party.

Happy birthday

Late Saturday, following training with the martial arts club, Moka and another girl entered the girls' dorm. The attendant looked up and noted the two ladies; she then returned her attention to her magazine. As the two of them took the stairs up to the fourth floor Moka turned to her blonde friend.

"I'm sorry about this Naruto-kun," Moka whispered. "But boys aren't allowed past the first floor."

The rather attractive blond girl smiled back at her. "No problem Moka-chan, I used to go out like this all the time."

She looked over at him in surprise. "Really?"

"Sure."

"Was it part of your ninja training?"

"A little bit, mostly it was something to do when I was bored. Oh and it was also a great way to get some free meals."

She really wasn't sure how to answer that so she settled for leading him up to her room. Naruto was really excited at the chance to be alone with Moka in her room. She opened the door and he stepped in.

"Surprise!!" A loud shout greeted him the second he stepped through the door. There standing in front of him were Kurumu and Yukari. Hanging from the ceiling was a sign that read, 'happy birthday.' To say Naruto was surprised would have been a bit of an understatement. He dropped the henge and stared at the girls.

"What's going on here?" He asked warily.

"We wanted to celebrate your birthday Naruto-kun," Moka said shyly as she shut the door.

"That's right!" Kurumu launched herself at him and forcibly shoved his face into her chest. "Happy birthday Naruto-kun!"

As she continued to press his face into her cleavage he began to wave his arms about wildly.

"I think you're smothering him," Yukari pointed out.

Able to breathe again Naruto looked at the three girls. "Uhm, thanks for the thought, I really appreciate it. But I don't usually celebrate my birthday."

"Why not darling?" Kurumu asked.

"A lot of reasons, but mostly because this day just reminds me of a lot of bad memories."

"Then we should try and make some good memories on this day." Moka said gently.

"That's right!" Yukari said. "You're turning sixteen and we should definitely celebrate it!"

"I appreciate it but I'd really rather not." Naruto said.

"But we all got you presents! And I even made you a special birthday cake!" Kurumu hurried into the kitchen.

Naruto noted that Moka's room was a lot bigger than his; it was actually a small apartment. Apparently the girls got more living space than the boys did. They were in a small living room that connected to a little kitchen. There were two doors that Naruto suspected led to a private bathroom and to Moka's bedroom.

"Here it is!" Kurumu said happily as she came out of the kitchen holding a birthday cake on a tray. All three of them stared at the cake

she was holding.

"What sort of cake is that you blue haired bimbo?!" Yukari shouted.

"What? It's chocolate. Naruto-kun likes chocolate."

"But you made it look like a naked version of you." Moka said embarrassed.

"It's an X-rated birthday cake!" Yukari said outraged.

"So what? Naruto-kun likes looking at my body." She smiled at him.

"Don't you Naruto-kun?"

"Ahhhh..." Naruto tried desperately to think up a safe answer.

"Open wide Naruto-kun, and make sure you're looking at me as you eat it." Kurumu placed a forkful of cake into his mouth.

"Ah, why are you feeding him again?" Moka asked.

"It's a tradition; you don't mind do you Naruto-kun?"

He shook his head as he ate the cake, it was really good. Kurumu really knew how to cook. He swallowed his cake. "Not at all, I think it's kind of cute that you want to feed me."

Kurumu smiled at him eagerly. "So is there anything you'd like to tell me Naruto-kun?"

"The cake is really delicious, thank you for making it for me." He was surprised when his answer seemed to disappoint her.

"Is that *all* you want to tell me?"

"Uhm, it's really, *really* delicious?" He wasn't sure what he was supposed to say.

Kurumu was staring at him in confusion. *No way! That love potion I put in the cake should have him confessing his undying love for me!* Kurumu had put in a special succubus formula (it only worked on males) that should have made him fall in love with the first girl he saw after eating it. What she didn't realize was that one of the Kyuubi's little, 'gifts' was that it made Naruto immune to all poisons or mind altering drugs.

"Here try some more cake!" She shoveled another forkful into his mouth hoping that he just needed a bigger dose.

After four servings the girls were finally able to convince Kurumu to stop force feeding Naruto cake. Eventually they got to the point of giving him their presents.

Kurumu handed him a huge cloth sack. "Here's my gift, a year's supply of cookies!"

He accepted it with a laugh. "Thanks Kurumu-chan."

Yukari then stepped up with what was obviously a rather thick book hidden beneath some wrapping paper. "Here Naruto-kun, this is a very special tome that was in my family's library. I had to go all the way back home and convince my dad to part with it, but it's yours. Happy birthday!"

Yukari liked books a great deal more than he did. But obviously she'd gone thorough a great deal of trouble so he took the gift appreciatively. "Thank you Yukari-chan." He quickly removed the wrapping. "Oh, a book about ninja, well that's really thoughtful of you."

"Look inside," she encouraged.

Just to please her he opened the book to a random spot and took a quick glance. "It's really..." he suddenly noticed just what was written down in front of him. "NO WAY!!!"

"Hah, I knew you'd like it!" Yukari said happily.

"Oh Yukari, thank you, thank you, thank you!" He picked the eleven year old up into the air and twirled her about as he hugged her.

"Just what the hell is in that book anyway?" Kurumu asked.

Naruto set the little girl down again. "It has jutsu formulas and instructions! This book is like a whole collection of jutsu scrolls! Now I can finally start learning how to use more than two lousy jutsus!"

Yukari nodded. "That book lists two hundred jutsus that were popular when it was published about seventy years ago. It also contains information on various ninja techniques and practices."

"This is great," he was eagerly flipping through the pages trying to decide what he should study first. "How can I ever thank you?"

"How about you, me, and Moka-chan spend the night together?" Yukari answered immediately.

Both he and Moka blushed at the suggestion. "Ah, I don't think that's going to happen."

"Well how about a thank you kiss?"

He smiled at her. "Now that I think I can do." He leaned down to give her a kiss on the cheek. Yukari, timing it perfectly, turned her face and received his kiss on her lips instead.

"Yeah!" she shouted. "My very first kiss from a boy!"

Naruto looked at the little girl in surprise, and with a sense he had done something slightly criminal. "That's also the first time I've ever kissed a girl." Somehow Yukari had gotten his very first kiss.

"Oh me next, me next! I want a thank you kiss too!" Kurumu said and came up to him.

Naruto hesitated, but couldn't really think of a fair way *not* to kiss Kurumu as well. So he leaned in and kissed her lips. Despite all her wild behavior and attitudes she was actually as inexperienced as he was. It was a chaste short kiss, but when he ended it he was very pleased to see the girl was blushing and looking very happy. Naruto glanced over at Moka, sort of hoping she would ask for one too. Seeing him look in her direction she nervously cast her eyes down on the floor.

Naruto had expected Moka's present next but she had asked to give it to him later. For the next couple of hours he and the girls ate cake, drank punch, and talked. Naruto kept peeking at his new book looking at all the cool jutsus. In one night he'd just gotten more help in the ninja arts than he's received in the last three years. This was by far the best birthday he'd ever had. When he'd turned nine Iruka had tried to celebrate it with him, but he hadn't been interested. (Though he'd still accepted the really cool fire truck Iruka had gotten him as a present.) He was surprised when it was time to wrap things up and he was actually feeling disappointed. Kurumu wanted to stay awhile longer but Yukari insisted that they had to leave him and Moka alone so she could give him his gift. After saying good night and Yukari dragging Kurumu out the door Naruto found himself alone with Moka in her room.

The two of them stood wrapped in an awkward silence for a moment. Both acutely aware they were alone together.

"Thank you for all this," he finally spoke. "This was probably your idea. I've never really celebrated my birthday before, it was fun."

She smiled. "I'm very glad you enjoyed it Naruto-kun. I know how lonely birthdays can be sometimes and I wanted you to have a good one." She paused and gathered herself. "So, why don't I give you my present?"

"O.k."

From out of her coat pocket she produced a small glass vial with a pinkish liquid inside. "Here," she handed it over to him.

He looked at it curiously. "What is it?"

"A potion of dream summoning," she told him. "It's a very special magical potion that will allow you to speak to the spirit of someone long dead within your dreams. In this case it will allow you to speak to your parents."

"Wh... what?" he stared at her not believing.

"If you drink this potion you will fall into a deep sleep and enter the dream realm, where your parents' spirits will be summoned. There they will be able to speak with you."

He felt the blood drain from his face. "For real? It won't just be a dream?"

She shook her head. "If you take that potion it will be absolutely real Naruto-kun. It will only be for a few hours, but for that time their spirits will be with you and you can talk to them."

He looked down at the small vial.

"I have to warn you though," she said. "What they have to say to you may not be what you want to hear. Please understand that parents aren't always what we want them to be." Melancholy thoughts about her own mother and father flashed through her head. "I hope it is not the case but meeting them might hurt more than never knowing them."

He slowly nodded. "I understand, but I have to know. There are things I have to ask them." He took a deep breath. "Moka-chan, thank you for this. I don't know how this is possible but you've given me a chance I never ever thought I'd have. However this turns out you have my thanks forever."

She nodded; she'd known he would decide to take it. But he'd needed to hear the warning just the same. "If you're going to take it why don't you come lie down on my bed? You can stay here until morning."

He began to blush just at the thought of sleeping in Moka's bed. "I was planning just to go back to my room and take it there. Is there any special reason why I should take it here?"

She looked down feeling embarrassed. "No, it's just; I would like to be able to watch over you while you are in this deep sleep."

Hearing that fresh warmth filled him. "All right, if you really don't mind."

Her bed was surprisingly soft. There were red satin sheets that felt like silk to the touch. He was lying on top of her bed. His shoes and jacket off, but the rest of his clothes still on. She was sitting in a chair right beside him.

"I'll just sit right here until you wake up," she said tenderly.

"Thank you for this Moka-chan." He unstopped the vial and gave her a salute. "Sweet dreams." In one motion he tossed the liquid down his throat, it was surprisingly bitter. Almost as soon as he swallowed it his eyes grew heavy and his head hit the pillow.

She put away the vial and made sure he was sleeping comfortably. Then she sat back down to watch over him.

"Sleep well my dear one," she gently touched his face. "And dream of wonders."

The dream

Singing.

He heard a woman's voice singing to him.

All the clouds in the sky.

All the stars in the heavens.

I'll gather them up.

For my precious little one.

All the flowers in the field.

All the dreams of my heart.

I'll gather them up.

For my precious little one.

He thought she had a beautiful voice. It felt as though she was singing just for him. Along with the voice he began to realize that someone was holding him and rocking him back and forth. Normally he didn't like people having a hold of him, but this embrace felt gentle and comforting. He didn't mind it at all. He opened his eyes.

He saw a beautiful face smiling down at him. She had green eyes and long flowing red hair. She was wearing what looked like ninja gear that was mostly orange. As he came fully conscious he was also aware that he wasn't in his body. At least he wasn't in his current body. Somehow he had reverted back into a small child of six or seven, back when he still had at least a little bit of innocence.

Seeing his eyes open she stopped rocking him and spoke. "Hello Naru-chan, I am so happy to finally be with you again."

Her tone was so tender and affectionate. No one had ever spoken to him like this before. He somehow knew that this woman would never harm him. "Are... are you my kaasan?"

Her sudden laughter caught him off guard, as did her hugging him so tight. "Oh how I've longed to hear you call me that my little one! Yes, I am kaasan, I am your mother."

Hearing that he put his small arms around her and said something he had always longed to say just once. "Mommy."

For several minutes they both simply wept and held on to each other. If this had been all there was, if the dream had ended at that moment. It would have been enough. For Naruto, to finally know his mother's face, to hear her voice, to feel her arms protectively around him, and to know that she had loved him. If there had been no more than that it would have been enough.

He remained securely in her arms but began to look about. They seemed to be in a patch of dead forest. He recognized it as the terrain that surrounded Youkai academy. "Mom, where are we?"

She quickly wiped away her tears before answering. "We are in the realm of dreams my son. The land around you will respond to your wishes, we are in this forest because it is where you want us to be." She reached down and gently wiped the tears from his cheeks. "Just as you are in this form because it is how you truly see yourself."

Naruto shook his head denying it. "I'm not a little boy. I'm a man and a ninja."

"In the waking world you are. But in your heart of hearts you still see yourself as an innocent child."

"No," he spoke in a weary voice. "I haven't been innocent for a very long time." He looked up at her. "Mother do you know what my life has been like?"

"I do," she squeezed him tight again. "And I'm so sorry my precious son. You did not deserve the cruelty you received. Your father's dying wish was that you be seen as a hero."

At her mention of his father he suddenly looked around. "My father! Where is he? Weren't you both supposed to be summoned?"

"I am sorry Naru-chan," she said sadly. "Your father's spirit is locked away in the belly of a shinigami." Fresh tears came to her eyes. "His sacrifice was for all of time, and so he can never see you, not even here."

"I don't understand," Naruto said. It didn't seem fair.

She sighed. "Let me start by first telling you that your father and I both loved you very much, and that we both wanted you. Had the Kyuubi not come and had we both lived I think we would have been a very happy family. But fate was not that kind, and your father was forced to make a terrible choice."

"Choice? What sort of choice?"

"Naruto, my name is Uzumaki Kushina and I was secretly married to your father, Namikaze Minato who was the Yondaime Hokage."

He felt his stomach turn to lead. "I... I was the son of the Yondaime? The Hokage was my father?"

"Yes Naru-chan, you are the son of the fourth Hokage and the last member of the Uzumaki and Namikaze clans."

"He... he put a demon into his own son?" He felt all the old bitter resentments rise up along with a fresh hate. "How could he do that to his own son? All this time, I thought I was just a victim of bad timing or bad luck. The village needed a baby and I just happened to be picked. But now you tell me it was done on *purpose*, that I was *chosen*. What kind of monster could do that to his own child?!"

"It wasn't like that!"

"Then how was it?" He asked bitterly. "Tell me mother, how could he do that to me? My own father."

"Naruto you must understand," she said pleadingly. "He was desperate and there was no other way. No mortal power could stand against the Kyuubi. The only possible way to save the village was to seal it. Your father did so at the cost of not only his life but his immortal soul."

"And why was I chosen? Did he not love me at all?"

"He loved you very much! Son don't think the decision was made easily or without much suffering. It tore his heart to know that you would have to suffer. But the sacrifice had to be made in order to save the village. And he felt that the responsibility fell upon his clan, he did not feel he could ask anyone else to make a sacrifice he was unwilling to make himself." She paused, hoping he would understand. "He understood the burden he was placing on you but it was the only way. He truly hoped that the people would understand and see you as the hero you are."

"A hero?" He said mockingly. "Is that how he consoled his guilty conscience as he put that monster inside me? Do you know how the people of the village see him? He's not just a hero there; he is practically worshipped as a god. They built a shrine to him. People go there to make sacrifices and ask for good fortune, as though he were a kami." He looked at her angrily. "Do you know how they treated me?"

"Yes," she whispered. "I know my dear one."

"Fear, hatred, disgust, that's what I received, and I never even knew why. I would ask them as they hurt me why, what had I done? Every day I lived in that damn village I was treated like that and I never even knew why. And now you tell me it was because my father *chose* that for me."

"Naruto..."

"He never loved me."

"That's not true! Your father did love you! He loved you very much!"

"You don't hurt the people you love," Naruto said coldly. "I don't know very much about love, but I at least know that much. There are two people I really care for, and I would *never* deliberately hurt them, not for any reason."

"Naruto, he never wanted you to suffer. Can't you understand that he was faced with a terrible choice? He had to balance his duty to you as a father with that he owed to the village as its Hokage. He struggled with the choice, but in the end he felt he had to save the village no matter the cost."

"So he saved the village and condemned me?"

"It wasn't supposed to be like that," she said sorrowfully.

"Why didn't I get his name? Why didn't people at least know who I was? So that they'd know when they were spitting on me they were spitting on him too."

"Your father had many enemies outside the village. It was decided to keep your true identity a secret to protect you."

"Protect me?!" He actually laughed. "Protect me? Hah, hah, it wasn't people outside the village who I needed protection from. So all that time I was poor and living in a dirty little apartment with no heat I was actually the heir to the Namikaze fortune? I guess they wanted me to be poor to help protect me too?"

"Naruto, your father didn't know how things would go. He had only a few hours to make his decision. He did the best he could under the circumstances. Can't you understand that?"

"I understand I was used for the good of the village. As a ninja, I can accept that. For that is a ninja's lot in life, to be used by his village in whatever way they need him. But I wasn't a ninja then, I was a helpless baby. And my father should have protected me. You say it was my duty because I was his son? Yet I wasn't even allowed to have his name. His memory was worshipped while his son was treated like a criminal. I don't care if it wouldn't have been fair; he should have asked someone else's child to do this. If he really loved me then he should have protected me, not just used me." He looked into his mother's eyes. "I will never forgive him."

"Naruto..."

"No," he said firmly. "I understand what he did and why he did it. But I'll never forgive my father for deliberately choosing to do it to me. Now I don't want to talk about him anymore." He put his arms back around her. "We only have a little time mom, I want to know about you. Tell me about yourself, tell me everything you can. I want to know you!"

She wanted desperately to convince her son to forgive his father. But looking into his eyes she could see the bitter feelings in his heart. There was so little time, and she knew that she would not be able to turn his heart in the little time they had. So though it saddened her, she decided not to try. This was her one and only chance to talk to him.

"Very well son, I was born of the Uzumaki clan in the village hidden in then Whirlpool. When I was young..."

She told him wonderful stories about Whirlpool and about the Uzumaki. He laughed as she told him about some of the pranks she had pulled and about her love of orange and of ramen. She told him about Konoha through her eyes. He wished he could see the village the way she did. She told him about battles fought and about precious friends long lost. He wept as she told him about the tragic end of the Uzumaki and of Whirlpool village. He asked her questions

and she answered them. And all the while she held him in her arms. It was wonderful.

But it couldn't last.

Kushina looked around and saw the trees and the ground beginning to fade away. She smiled back down at her son. "Our time is almost up Naru-chan."

"No!" he tightened his grip around her. "Mom I don't want to lose you!"

"I'm so sorry Naru-chan, but you lost me many years ago. I am just so glad I was given this chance to hold you again and talk to you. We *will* meet again, though I pray not for many, many years yet. Now there is one last thing I need to tell you."

"What is it mom?"

"That girl you like, Moka?" His mother smiled. "I like her too, and I think she will be good for you."

"Thanks mom that means a lot to me." He looked around and saw the world around them disappearing. He shut his eyes and pressed his face against her and held her as tight as he could. "I love you mom!"

"I love you too my darling."

"Mom, keep telling me that you love me! I want that to be the last thing I hear!"

Her arms wrapped tight around him and gently began to rock him back and forth. "I love you Naru-chan. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you..."

He opened his eyes.

He was lying on top of Moka's bed. Outside the window light was just beginning to leak in. He was looking up into Moka's worried face.

"Naruto-kun, why are you crying?" He felt her hand gently wiping his tears away. "Did it not go well?"

He smiled at her and slowly sat up. "It went fine. I met my mother and I got to know her. She really loved me."

"I'm very glad. What about your father?"

"My father couldn't be summoned."

"Oh I'm so sorry!"

"It's fine, it turns out my father isn't who I'd hoped he'd be."

She looked disappointed. "Are you sorry you took the potion then?"

"Not even a little bit," he leaned forward. "Thank you Moka-chan." He kissed her. He could feel her lips tremble against his. But after the initial surprise she relaxed and gladly returned his kiss. When he pulled back he could see the blush on her face.

"So... so was that a thank you kiss?" She asked nervously.

"Yeah, but this one's not." He slowly leaned forward and kissed her again. She closed her eyes and happily enjoyed the feeling of their lips pressing together. When this second kiss ended he called her name in an urgent whisper. "Moka-chan?"

"Ye... yes?" she answered a bit breathlessly.

"Will you go out with me? Will you be my girlfriend?"

She nodded happily. "Yes, of course I will!"

They spent the rest of the morning kissing and holding each other.

Let it begin

The news that Naruto and Moka were a couple was greeted by despair by most of the male student body, by joy from Yukari (who saw this as a step closer to an eventual threesome), and as a challenge by Kurumu.

"I am not giving up on him," Kurumu told Moka the first chance she got alone with her. "Naruto-kun is my destined one and I am going to be with him."

"But Naruto-kun has decided who he wants, he is my boyfriend now. We are officially together." Moka said.

"Hmph, I refuse to see this as anything but an obstacle on my path to a happy marriage. Naruto is still young, it's only natural he make some mistakes before he finally settles down with his true love."

Moka's face darkened angrily. "What we have together is no mistake. Naruto-kun is mine now and I won't let you or anyone else take him from me!"

Kurumu smiled and crossed her arms over her chest. "You have him for right now, but mark my words he'll choose me in the end."

Two Months Later

In the predawn light he took out a kunai. He let his wind chakra surround it. *Focus on giving it an edge. Picture two sides grinding against each other, sharpening.* When he was satisfied he whipped the kunai back and threw it straight at a nearby tree. The blade went clean through the tree and then through the boulder lying behind it.

"Now that is an effective attack," he said happily as he retrieved his weapon.

"That was wonderful," Moka applauded. More and more of their morning workouts together had been focused on his learning jutsus and ninja skills. She didn't mind in the least as it made him happy to increase his abilities and she was glad he was getting stronger. Youkai academy could be a dangerous place after all. "You are really amazing at how quickly you keep learning these new spells."

"Jutsus," he corrected.

"Jutsus," she repeated. "You really are amazing."

He smiled, enjoying his girlfriend's praise. "Well, it's all thanks to Yukari's book. I've always been good at learning things when I'm really motivated." He ran through some hand signs. "**Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" Following a massive puff of smoke fifty perfect clones appeared. Naruto puffed out his chest, especially pleased to have mastered this particular jutsu. "You know I spent years trying to make just one functioning ordinary clone without ever managing it. Then I was able to figure out how to make these really powerful shadow clones after just one night of studying." He shook his head in disgust. "I can't help but wonder how powerful I'd be if I'd actually gotten some help from my village." With a thought he dismissed the clones.

"Well the important thing is that you're getting stronger now," Moka said. She smiled and moved closer to him. "Mmmm, your scent, it's wonderful."

She had a look in her eyes that he had come to know well. With a sigh he turned his neck to her. "Go ahead."

"Thank you!" With that she eagerly sunk her teeth into him.

That morning the first semester test results were posted. All two hundred and fifty six members of the freshman class were ranked.

"I'm number one," Yukari said happily. "See I really am a genius."

Hanging on firmly to Naruto's arm Moka pointed to where she was listed. "I am number thirteen."

Naruto smiled at her. "My girlfriend, beautiful, powerful, and intelligent. What more could a guy possibly ask for?"

Moka smiled happily. Since being with him she had started to forget what it had been like to be lonely. "Where are you Naruto-kun?"

He pointed to a spot on the opposite end of the board. "I'm number one ninety two," he said without any embarrassment at all.

"Naruto-kun, aren't you worried about your standing?" Yukari asked.

"What do you mean? I'm passing everything with at least a C minus." He said. "I'm even in the top 75 percent of the freshman class."

"But you could be doing much better," Moka insisted. "I've seen the way you learn jutsus. I know if you just tried a little harder with class work you could do much better."

"Maybe," Naruto admitted. "But school work just doesn't interest me the way learning jutsus do. So long as I pass that's all that matters. Besides, it's not like I'm going to become a teacher or an accountant when I graduate."

Yukari turned to a certain blue haired succubus. "So where are you ranked?"

"Oh I think they left my name out," she said. (Actually she was number two fifty one.) "Lets all go have lunch!" She quickly got them moving before they could spot her name up on the board.

The four of them were sitting at one of the outdoor tables enjoying a quiet routine lunch. (Though Moka preferred blood she could and did eat regular food.) None of them noticed a small group watching them

from one of the academy roof tops. One observer was especially interested.

"Half breed scum," Saizou muttered angrily.

"Something wrong?" Another student with a scar running down his forehead asked.

"Just look Midou-san," he pointed angrily down into the courtyard. "Akayashi Moka and Kurono Kurumu, the two most beautiful girls in the freshman class. They're sitting there with that worthless piece of garbage, Uzumaki Naruto."

"So?" Midou asked unimpressed. "What does it matter who he sits with? He's a half breed and not the worry of us outcast ayashi (rogue monsters.) We need to worry about the pure breeds who think they're superior to us."

"He has somehow started getting a reputation for being strong that is totally undeserved. I should know, I fought the little bastard."

"Fought and lost, from what I hear." Midou reminded him.

"It was Moka that defeated me," Saizou retorted. "She's a vampire and I was no match. He's a total weakling. So long as I keep him away from Moka I'd slaughter him."

"Rumor says they're dating," Midou pointed out. "Keeping them apart might be difficult."

"I'm sure I could manage, with a little help." He nodded to the other two outcast ayashi who both smiled.

"I'm down for it," a boy with a reptilian face said. "If we take him down it will improve our reputations right?"

"That's just what I was thinking Moroha," Saizou said. "Naruto's getting way too much of a reputation from his fight with me and some

guy named Taro. A half breed with such a reputation reflects badly on us right?"

Midou frowned, not only at Saizou but at the other two who were obviously eager to back him up. "If you want to fight this guy I won't tell you no. But you had better understand something. Being part of this crew means everything you do reflects back on us. We only have one absolute rule; any fight we choose we definitely have to win! Failure won't be tolerated. Do you understand?"

Saizou grinned at his two supporters and nodded back to Midou. "Sure thing, just leave it all to me."

Midou shook his head and said nothing else. Saizou didn't really understand what he was risking by picking this fight. If he won, everything would be fine and his reputation within the organization would improve. But if he lost...

Well if he lost that would be proof he was weak, and there was no place for the weak among them.

Following their club activities Moka and Naruto were heading back to the dorms arm in arm as usual. Watching them from cover Saizou felt his anger growing hotter. Ever since his humiliation at her hands he'd longed for this day. Looking at her he still hungered for her. Still longed to make her his. He wanted to humble her and show her that she was nothing but another weak female. As for Naruto, he wanted the bastard dead pure and simple. It infuriated him to think that lowly half breed had somehow made Moka his. That a weakling like that could have something he hadn't been strong enough to take burned like acid in his mouth. There was no way he could ever let this go.

"Do it," he said.

Moroha smiled and moved.

Moroha had transformed his hands and arms into long blade shaped bone. Moving quickly and from behind he aimed to skewer Naruto. But he underestimated Naruto's senses and the amount of noise he made running across the ground. Hearing him coming from behind Naruto reacted.

"Look out!" He shoved Moka safely to the side as he himself dodged away.

Moroha let out a shout of anger and frustration as he missed cleanly. "Damn it!" He turned to face Naruto as his friend came out to join him.

"Naruto-kun!" Moka was about to run to his side when she was roughly grabbed around the shoulders by a fully transformed Saizou.

"Oh no you don't!" Saizou dragged her back away from Naruto and the others. "I know all about you transforming if he takes off your rosary. I'm not going to let him get anywhere near you. After my friends deal with your boyfriend I'll pay you back for how you humiliated me."

"Saizou please release me!" Moka pleaded.

"Let her go!" Naruto shouted furiously.

"You should worry about yourself," Moroha grinned as he and his friend spread out and began moving towards him from right and left. "You're out numbered after all."

Naruto smiled at that. "You think so?" He performed some hand signs. " **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" There were puffs of smoke all around. When they cleared there were a hundred clones present. "Count again."

"What the hell?!" Moroha stared about in sudden panic. "Saizou! You never said he could do anything like this!"

"He didn't have this trick last time." Saizou called out. "Don't worry; it's just some weak illusion magic."

Saizou found out this was not the case when the nearest group jumped on top of him trying to forcibly take his arms off Moka. They had no success with that as they lacked the raw strength to force him to let go. However one of the clones did pull on Moka's rosary. It snapped off with a tiny clink. Her body was immediately surrounded by a powerful demonic aura.

"Oh hell not again!" He wailed and let go of her.

In the meantime the other clones took out their kunai. "Remember," the original shouted out. "Two edges grinding against one another." That was the mental image suggested in a section of Yukari's book to help focus wind chakra. The clones all focused their chakra around their kunai, giving their weapons edges far sharper and stronger than steel. All the Narutos gave a shout and came rushing forward as one, eager for it.

Moroha and his friend tried to fight them off but had no chance. He was stunned when he saw some of the kunai slice right through his bone blades. They also had no trouble cutting into his hide. He and his friend screamed in pain as they were cut and stabbed. Naruto could have easily killed them both but instead had his clones inflict non lethal injuries, being satisfied to just defeat them.

Meanwhile Saizou was in an even worse situation. He was facing a very powerful and very angry vampire. "You dare to touch me a second time?!"

"So... sorry?" he held his arms out pitifully. He never even saw the punch that shattered his ribs and sent him flying through the air and crashing through a pair of trees. Before he could even stand she delivered a vicious kick straight into his broken ribs that sent him flying through the air screaming in pain. When he again came to a halt he found her standing over him, her foot pressing down onto his neck cutting off his air.

"You miserable animal, how dare you attack me yet again?! Do you dare imagine you are some sort of threat to me? Never again so much as look at me or I *will* end your wretched life! Never touch me again, not even in your dreams! Know your place!" With that she removed her foot from his throat and instead kicked him in the ribs again sending him flying once more.

With the short brutal fight complete Naruto dismissed his clones while the transformed inner Moka approached him. She took a moment to glance at the two bloodied and defeated enemies lying in the road.

"It seems you truly have improved Uzumaki Naruto. Are you injured?"

"No I'm fine Moka-ch... ah Moka-san. Are you all right?"

With an amused look she lifted a single eyebrow. "Do you really believe I could be hurt by such a weak opponent?"

"Well, not once you transformed, but you might have been hurt before."

"Your concern is unnecessary Uzumaki Naruto, I am uninjured." She looked at him carefully. "While I am here I wish to discuss something with you."

"Uhm, yes?"

Her look of amusement disappeared and was replaced by a very serious one. It was a look that made him nervous. "You should realize that while I am a different personality I am forced to share this body with the other Moka. As I know you are aware, what she experiences I also experience."

He blushed a bit and nodded. "Ah, yes, I know about that." He suddenly felt as though he were talking to his girlfriend's strict older

sister.

"As the other Moka accepts you as her boyfriend, and as it brings her pleasure, I will not object to your kissing her or touching her as you have done so far. However," she said sharply. "You are not to go any further, most specifically you are *not* to take her virginity. As long as we share this body I will not tolerate that. Is that clear Uzumaki Naruto?"

He quickly nodded his ascent. "I understand," he was sure any other answer would lead to immediate physical pain.

She then surprised him as she took out the rosary. "If you wish to have sex with this body I am the one you will have to seduce." He felt his jaw actually drop and his heartbeat begin to race. "Though of course we both know that is impossible." She actually had a slight smirk on her face as she put her rosary back on and transformed into an unconscious teenage Moka.

From his hiding spot in the woods Midou had watched the regrettable events play out. It was unfortunate, but he would have to deal with Saizou for failing. He had tried to warn him. It was a real shame; he'd had hopes for Saizou.

Once that was out of the way he would have to deal with the two of them, the vampire and the half breed. They had just humiliated three members of his crew, there was no way he could let that stand.

They had to die.

Awakening the demon

Saizou howled as he felt the just healed ribs snap and break. "Mercy!" He cried out. His answer was to have his ribs stomped on again.

"Mercy?" Midou mocked, He brought his over sized fist down cracking open Saizou's skull and sending blood spraying up into his face. "There's no place for mercy here. I warned you what would happen if you lost didn't I?"

Though in agony he looked around at the other members of the crew. They were just sitting there watching. He saw his friend Mohoha and reached a hand out to him. "Please, help me..."

"What? You want me to be killed too?" Mohoha said coldly.

"Can you at least try and die with a little self respect?" Midou sounded disappointed. "You never showed anyone any mercy when you were on top, you can't really expect any now." He brought his fists down on Saizou's face again and again, flattening it and sending his brains and blood all over the floor. When he'd finally had enough Midou stopped and looked up at the other members. He was pretty much covered in blood. He looked at their eyes and nodded to himself. There was no need to say anything, the lesson had obviously been taken to heart. "Take this garbage and bury it somewhere."

It had been a couple weeks since Saizou's attack. Naruto and Moka were both glad that he seemed to have left school. Naruto was still amazed at how easily violence and even death was accepted here. Every week it seemed at least one or two students went missing or were found dead. At a normal high school there would have been mass panic and demands for better security or even demands that the school be closed. Yet here the violence was simply accepted. It

was almost seen as a part of common life and hardly worth noticing. Naruto thought back to his time in Konoha. He fully understood that humans could be just as brutal, even the ordinary humans who were not ninja. But in human society violence that occurred within the village was seen as an aberration, as a crime. (War and ninja missions were in a different category.) At least when the victim of said violence was not universally hated.

When he thought about it Naruto suspected there was probably as much violence in human society as there was in monster society. The difference seemed to be that humans tended to see violent behavior as the exception, whereas monsters viewed it more as the norm. He wondered if that meant monsters were more barbaric, or just more honest.

Even though he was surrounded by violence and potential enemies Naruto was happier than he'd ever been. He was finally making headway in the ninja arts and becoming stronger. He'd made two really good friends who he'd grown close to and become fond of. And most importantly of all he had an amazing girlfriend. Of course there were a few issues. One of his friends was constantly threatening to smother him every time he greeted her. She was also trying her best to come between him and his girlfriend. As for said girlfriend there was the slight issue that she liked to drink his blood on a daily basis. There was also the fact that she had a second personality that was kind of scary (though also very hot.) Not to mention that if he ever wanted to have sex with his girlfriend he would have to somehow convince that second personality.

Well, no one ever said life was simple.

"What are you thinking?"

Naruto came out of his own thoughts and looked over at the girl he was walking arm in arm with. Moka was everything he could have ever wished for in a girlfriend. She was absolutely beautiful, sweet, kind, smart, and even powerful. Every single time they walked together he drew jealous looks from the other boys. Despite the

problems that came with her being a suppressed vampire he still couldn't help but wonder how such an amazing girl had wound up with an idiot like him.

"I was wondering why you chose me." He said.

She looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"You're such an incredible girl Moka-chan," he said seriously. "And you can have your pick of any guy here. I'm just wondering why you picked me. I mean there are better looking guys, stronger guys, smarter guys; so why are you with someone like me?"

She looked at him for a moment as they continued to walk together. She let out a deep sigh. "Naruto-kun, please don't be such an idiot."

"Huh?"

"All these boys," she glanced over at them. "They stare at me and tell me how much they like me. They all like me in *this* form, if they saw me in my true form they wouldn't come near me. I've seen it my entire life, vampires are not liked by other monsters. We are too powerful and too scary, they fear and avoid us." She put her head down on his shoulder. "But you've seen the real me and you're not afraid. That is what makes you so special to me Naruto-kun. That is why you never need to worry about any other boy taking your place."

He smiled at her. "Thanks Moka-chan, I'm sorry if I'm a little paranoid. It's just that I've never had a girlfriend before. Thank you for setting my mind at ease."

"I am happy to."

They walked on for a little bit.

"Naruto," she lifted her head from his shoulder. She had a worried look on her face. "There is something I've been wondering about too."

"Yes?"

"What happens when you graduate?"

He looked at her in total surprise. "Graduate? Why are you worried about that? That's a long ways off."

"So you haven't given it even a little bit of thought?"

"Well I don't really need to give it any thought. I am bound to follow the orders of my Hokage. He has already informed me that when I graduate from this place I will return to my village. I'll be given the academy graduation test and then be allowed to become a ninja and finally begin my career."

"Become a ninja? Aren't you a ninja already?"

Looking a bit embarrassed he reached up and touched the hitai-ite that was always around his forehead. "Well technically I'm only a citizen of my village. I won't become a ninja officially until I pass the test and am awarded the rank of Genin. My old sensei gave me this and told me I was a ninja in his eyes, so I consider myself to be one even if it is unofficial."

"So you'll go back to your village?"

He nodded. "That's right."

"But I thought you hated it there," she said. "You haven't told me much about your past but I know they made you leave when you were eight. From things you've said I know they haven't helped you much and you never mention the village in a positive way. I definitely got the feeling you didn't like it. Was I wrong?"

He let out a long depressed sigh. "No, I can't say I have any good memories of that place. And to be honest the idea of going back there makes me very, very nervous."

"Then why go back?" She asked.

"It's complicated," he admitted. "There are things you don't know about, things I can't tell you. But if I were to not go back my village would come after me. The Hokage would send hunter nins to find and execute me. I would have to spend the rest of my life as a rogue ninja, what they call a missing nin. Besides that, even though I don't give a damn about the people there I do want to see Iruka-sensei again. I want to have a great career and be a great ninja so that he can be proud of me."

She smiled. "You really care about your old teacher don't you?"

"Except for you Moka-chan he is the only other person that truly matters to me."

"And what about me?" she asked in a small voice.

"What?"

"What about me?" She repeated. "What place do I have in your future? Or do I only get to be with you for as long as we are both here?"

He brought them to a halt and turned to face her directly. "Moka-chan, what are you talking about? I am crazy about you and want you to always be with me. You're the girl who has my heart and I can't imagine ever giving it to anyone else."

"Naruto-kun, I feel the same way. Since I've been with you it's like I've felt really alive for the first time. I don't feel lonely anymore; just getting to be with you makes me happy. And when you kiss me..." she suddenly turned a dark shade of red. "Well, you make me happier than I ever thought I could be. I don't ever want to be without you."

"Then you won't be," he said firmly. "We'll always be together."

"How?" she asked. "I know how hard it was to hide my identity among regular humans. How long could I keep what I am a secret

surrounded by ninja? If they found out what I really was what would happen to me? Would they be willing to accept a vampire living among them?"

"I... I don't know." She was asking some very hard questions. She was definitely right that it would be hard for her to keep her secret for any amount of time. The village would be suspicious of any outsider who was attached to one of their ninja, especially him. And given the abilities of the Inuzuka or the Hyuuga or the Yamanaka her secret was likely to be exposed before long. Then what? Would they allow a vampire to be a resident of the village? Naruto had no illusions about how tolerant the people of Konoha were.

Seeing him struggling to try and answer she gently reached out to take his arm and got them walking again. "It's all right. Like you said graduation is a long way off. You don't have to decide anything right this minute. For now I am very happy with the way things are." She looked at him carefully. "But eventually you will have to make a decision about us."

He slowly nodded and did not say anything more. She had brought up some very difficult questions. He would need to give them some serious thought.

When they got to the girls' dorm they shared a quick kiss. "Do you want to come over for some dinner and some studying? I'll make some of that ramen you like!"

He gave her a weak smile. "Sure," he said. Moka was an amazing girl with a lot of wonderful qualities. Alas cooking was not one of them. *I hope she manages not to burn the ramen this time.*

When the time came there was a swirl of wind and leaves in Moka's living room. Having learned the shun shin he preferred to use it as a discrete way to go to and from Moka's without anyone noticing. As soon as he materialized he knew something was seriously wrong.

Moka was nowhere to be seen and there was no smell of burnt ramen in the air.

"Moka-chan? Moka are you here?" There was no answer to his call. Looking around he spotted her leather briefcase sitting on the kitchen counter. There was a note taped to it.

They were in an old abandoned warehouse a few miles from that academy. Inside Midou waited patiently as one of his men hurried up to him.

"He's coming, just like you said he would."

Midou nodded, not surprised. He looked over to where Moka was bound up in chains. "He must really love you; I mean to just walk right into what is an obvious trap. I'd certainly never do anything so stupid for anyone."

"Why are you doing this?" She asked. "We've never done anything to you."

"You exist vampire, and that's reason enough." Midou said coldly. "You elitist bastards who insist on thinking you're so superior to the rest of us. We outcast ayashi despise all you pure breeds and eventually we'll kill every last one of you. We'll create a world where our kind alone rule."

Moka stared at him. She could not understand such unreasoning hatred. "Then leave Naruto out of this, he is human, so you have no reason to hate him."

"Sorry, but that's not going to be possible. He helped to defeat three of my people. I can't let a half breed get away with that." Midou turned away from her and toward the gaping entrance to the warehouse. Naruto was calmly walking inside. "Welcome, I thank you for coming."

"Naruto please run!" Moka shouted to him. "Get out of here!"

"It's all right Moka-chan," he called out to her calmly. He continued to walk towards her as his eyes darted about. He could count ten people, all of them between him and a chained up Moka.

"I trust you didn't tell anyone about this before coming here?" Midou asked politely.

"No, I did as your note asked. Now let Moka go." He casually took out a kunai.

Smiling Midou began to walk towards him. His people began to move to slowly surround Naruto. "Your girlfriend was very hard to capture, I don't think I can just simply let her go." His body began changing and his right arm expanded into a mass of muscles. "You know you're very brave to come here all alone."

"I would go anywhere or do anything for Moka-chan. Now let her go or I'll make you pay for what you've done."

Midou laughed and kept walking towards him flexing his massive arm. "And what can one little human do?"

Naruto smiled. "I'm not just a human, I'm a ninja." With ease he threw the kunai at his opponent. Midou did not even bother to dodge as it sailed more than a foot from his head, actually landing near Moka's feet.

"Is that it?" Midou sounded disappointed. "I saw you fight against Saizou, is this really all you're going to do to try and save your precious girlfriend?" Midou was standing right in front of him raising his arm.

Naruto stood where he was calm and unmoving. "There's something you should know about ninja..."

"What's that?" Midou brought his arm down viciously striking the top of his opponent's head.

The instant he hit him Naruto disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Well behind Midou and the others the kunai's henge was dropped and Naruto stood right in front of Moka. "Ninja know how to be sneaky when necessary." He reached out and pulled off Moka's rosary.

Immediately she was surrounded by a powerful demonic aura. Her hair became silver, her eyes red, and her body became a mature woman's. With ease she snapped the chains that had held her. She spared Naruto a quick nod before moving with her amazing speed straight at Midou. "To be laying your hands on me you trash!" Before he could even move she sent her fist into his face and Midou flying into and through a brick wall. "Know your place!"

The other outcast ayashi stood there in stunned horror and began to babble in panic.

"No way!"

"She took him in one blow?!"

"We are so dead."

Moka looked at them contemptuously then glanced over to Naruto. "Uzumaki Naruto, I thank you for your assistance."

He smiled at her, relieved everything was now o.k. "No problem Moka-san."

She looked back at the others. "Leave now and never trouble either of us again, or else attack me and take your chances."

They all looked at each other nervously. None of them eager to fight someone powerful enough to defeat Midou-san with just one blow. As Moka was eying them the pile of fallen bricks was tossed aside

and Midou rushed toward her back. "Don't underestimate me!" He was fast and caught her with a powerful punch to her back that sent her down onto the concrete floor.

"Moka!" Naruto pulled out a pair of kunai and rushed over to her side. "Are you all right?"

Ignoring his outstretched hand she quickly got back to her feet. "Do not be so concerned Uzumaki Naruto, he caught me by surprise." She turned back towards Midou. "But such a weak monster could never defeat me." Again she moved straight at Midou with her full speed. Even though he was ready for her he was too slow to block her attacks. She struck him a quick series of punches and kicks that sent him reeling back. He tried to hit her but his punches with his huge arm seemed slow and clumsy and she had no trouble evading them.

As they fought Naruto kept an eye on the rest of them. Since she seemed to be having no trouble with her fight he decided to be her back up and keep an eye out for any sort of nasty surprise.

One of the outcast ayashi looked at another and nodded. Understanding the second ran over to a lever at the far wall.

Moka looked down at her bloodied and beaten opponent. "Have you had enough?" She asked with a snarl. "Or do you require more of a beating to know your place?"

Midou looked up at her and struggled back to his feet. "So this is the strength of a vampire. I finally understand, you take the energy of you demonic aura and convert it into physical power don't you? Simple, yet dreadfully effective. But..." he smiled at her with a bloodied mouth. "With only this you cannot win against me."

"What did you say?" Moka prepared to continue his beating.

"Vampires may hold the greatest power, but in exchange they are famous for their many weaknesses." Above them there was a

creaking sound, followed by the gentle fall of water from the sprinkler system. "Among them being water I believe."

"Ahhh!" Moka howled in agony and collapsed, her power painfully drained from her.

"Moka-san!" Seeing her in sudden trouble Naruto ran towards her regardless of the danger. But with the vampire now incapacitated and helpless the others were able to grab a hold of him.

"Get his arms and don't let him bring his hands together!" Midou ordered. "If he can't use his hands he can't work any of his magic."

Two got a hold of each arm and forced Naruto down to the ground. They were much too strong for him to shake loose and while they held his arms he could not work a jutsu. "Get away from Moka!" He screamed at them.

Midou wiped the blood from his mouth and smiled up towards the sprinklers. "To think, all it took to defeat a mighty vampire was a little water." He looked down at her; she was awake and conscious but barely able to move. "Would you like to make some more threats or tell me again about putting me in my place?"

She looked up at him. Despite the pain she was still able to speak. "Please, please let Naruto go. Do... do what you want with me, but let him go."

He shook his head. "Well how noble, how tragic, someone should write a book. Neither of you are going to survive this. The only question is who do I beat to death first?" He looked from Moka over to Naruto and then back again. "Lets do this the old fashioned way; lady's first." He lifted up his arm.

"Stop!!" Naruto howled. "Don't touch her!" He struggled like an animal but remained pinned to the ground.

"Does it hurt half breed?" Midou asked in a polite voice. "Knowing the girl you love is about to die and there's not a damn thing you can do but watch. Like I said before, what can one little human do?" He turned back to Moka and got ready to end her life.

Moka looked up, unafraid. *Please escape Naruto, I want you to live.*

Seeing what was about to happen Naruto felt a terrible rage fill him. He shut his eyes and looked inside to a dark place that had always been there. *Give me power!!* He cried out.

And there was an answer, something frightening stirred and came awake. He felt its power flow through him like fire. **Done!** A voice boomed and began to laugh.

Midou suddenly froze as he felt a new demonic aura fill the air. There were screams of terror as his people were suddenly tossed aside as though made of straw. Naruto was standing on his feet, a demonic aura blazing all around him. The aura was so powerful it actually took on a physical form, wrapping around Naruto like some sort of second skin. It took on the shape of an animal, even creating ears and a single tail. Midou could see that Naruto's body had transformed as well. His hands had become claws, the scars on his cheeks had thickened, and he now had fangs. But most frightening of all, his eyes were red and slitted, just like the vampires.

Moka was also watching and was just as amazed. *Naruto, how?*

Feeling not only his power but a ferocious killer intent Midou began backing away, Moka forgotten, his eyes locked on this new demonic figure. "Ho... How? You're human! You can't have a demonic aura! What the hell are you?!"

Naruto smiled. "I'm a monster, and I'm gonna kill you!"

Trust

Power.

Such incredible power!

He felt it pouring out of him like light from the sun. He felt limitless, invincible, almost godlike. *This is why they feared me, why they hated me so.* The reason for all his past suffering was suddenly clear. They'd understood what was inside of him all this time. They'd understood that one day he'd have this power, and they'd been afraid. *Could a human being really have this sort of power?* He suddenly recalled what Iruka-sensei had said to him so many years ago, telling him he was not a monster. *I wonder if Iruka-sensei might have been wrong.*

His train of thought disappeared as he saw Midou backing away from Moka. "Ho... how? You're human! You can't have a demonic aura! What the hell are you?!"

He smiled. He could smell Midou's fear. "I'm a monster, and I'm gonna kill you!" This bastard had been just about to kill the girl he loved. He'd get no mercy. Acting on pure instinct he dropped to all fours and dashed straight for him.

As Naruto came rushing at him he let loose a blood curdling howl that was not even close to human. Midou had been in a hundred fights in his life and come close to dying a few times. He'd never been scared. Even as the vampire had been beating him senseless he'd felt no fear at all. But that howl and the pressure of that killing intent bearing down on him left him feeling weak and frightened. "Wa... wait..." He wasn't sure what he was going to say. But whatever it was he never got the chance. Naruto raced up to him and raked his hand straight up and out. The demonic cloak that surrounded him mimicked his move. A claw made of the solid aura tore straight into his stomach and plunged in deep. Following the

motion of Naruto's hand it tore straight up through his chest and neck, gutting him and sending flesh and blood splattering all about. Midou collapsed in a lifeless heap without a sound, his eyes still open and his face still fearful.

Naruto suddenly stopped and looked down at what he had just done.

Eight Years Ago

"Why do we have to kill Iruka-sensei? Isn't it enough just to fight and win? Why must we kill?"

Iruka looked down at the eight year old. This was one of the hardest parts about training ninja, the stripping away of childhood innocence and exposing them to the harsh realities of ninja life.

"Naruto, I am afraid that killing is simply a necessary part of being a ninja. There is no way to avoid it. Be certain, if you become a ninja you *will* have to kill at some point."

"But why?" His own experiences had left him some strong opinions on the concept of murder.

Iruka sighed. "I'd like to tell you that you will only kill when absolutely necessary, to save your life or the life of a comrade. But that would be a lie. You may well have to kill under those circumstances, but it is just as likely you will have to kill even when that person is no threat. Assassinations are often requested and accepted by us and all other ninja villages. As a ninja you will be expected to be ready to kill whenever it is necessary."

"But why kill someone who's no threat?" Naruto demanded.

"Because Naruto, the world is a hard place with hard problems. And sometimes the best, the easiest solution, is to just kill the person who is the problem."

Naruto frowned. "I don't think I could ever really kill anyone, especially if they hadn't hurt me."

Iruka looked down at him sadly. "I'm sorry Naruto, but if you are going to be a ninja you have no choice, ninja kill."

He swallowed and looked away. "What if I can't?"

A gentle hand patted his shoulder. "It may be very hard Naruto, but when the time comes you will do what has to be done. Just as I have and just as every ninja has."

He'd always imagined the very first time he killed anyone it would be hard for him. He'd never once imagined it would be so... fun. He'd enjoyed it. Turning around he saw the other rogue monsters looking at him in terror. He smiled, eager to do it again. Then he glanced down at Moka. She was lying on the ground looking up at him. He couldn't read the expression on her face. *Is she afraid of me now?*

He knelt down beside her. "Are you all right Moka-san?"

She grunted and managed a slight nod; it was obvious she was in pain. "Please take me away from here Uzumaki Naruto."

"All right," he answered tenderly. Her safety mattered to him more than anything else. Not knowing how exactly, he suppressed his demonic aura, causing his cloak to disappear. His body however remained transformed. He carefully lifted her up and held her bridal style in his arms. Though he could not see himself he knew he had changed. He looked down into her face. She was looking back at him calmly enough. "Please don't be afraid of me," he whispered to her.

Her lips seemed to twitch just a bit. "And why would I fear you?"

Not sure how to answer that he looked at the faces of Midou's men; they were all still looking back at him frightened. "If any of you ever

touch Moka again I swear I'll kill you." He brought his hands together to perform the necessary signs and he and Moka disappeared in a swirl of air and leaves.

Once he was actually gone the remaining outcast ayashi finally got over their fear. They all left as quick as they could, not even bothering to bury their former leader. They were panicked and were quick to tell others what they'd seen. Before long everyone at Youkai academy would be talking about the human with the demonic aura.

The two of them reappeared in Moka's living room. Naruto carefully set her down on a small couch. "Is this o.k.? Would you rather have me take you to the infirmary?"

She wearily shook her head. "I have been badly drained, it will take me a few days to recover, but there is nothing they could do for me. I simply need rest."

He nodded relieved. He reached into his pocket and took out her rosary. "I'm glad you're all right," he handed her the rosary. "I'll just go then."

Her hand grabbed his wrist before he could begin forming the signs. Despite her exhaustion her grip was quite strong. "Sit down beside me Uzumaki Naruto, we must talk."

He gulped and slowly sat down beside her.

She eyed him carefully. She wasn't afraid, he was sure of that now. Her scent, her wonderful scent, had no trace of fear smell in it. But she reeked of curiosity. "Please explain to me how it was possible for you to have a demonic aura. And why you have transformed. Such things should be impossible for a human."

"I... I can't tell you."

"And why not?" She said coolly.

He looked away. "Because if I tell you you'll hate me," he answered miserably.

"Do not be a fool Uzumaki Naruto." He felt her hand gently touch his face and turn it back towards hers. "You have fought beside me and saved my life. You are the most precious one to my other self. Whatever it is you tell me, I could never hate you."

"You sound very sure of that."

She looked at him in surprise. "Do you really think so little of me Uzumaki Naruto?"

"It's not that," he tried to explain. "Everyone who knows the secret ends up hating me, except for two people. The old Hokage and Iruka-sensei were the only ones who didn't end up hating me. If you hated me too Moka-san I don't think I could bear it."

"This is obviously difficult for you. However," she said firmly. "I am going to ask you to trust that I will not be one of those who hates you."

"That's asking for a whole lot of trust Moka-san."

She slowly nodded. "I realize that Uzumaki Naruto, and I also understand that trust is precious and not easily earned. But please remember that I have fought for you and watched over you as you slept. You trusted me in those times, please trust in me now as well."

He looked at her, his red eyes looking into hers. He remembered their very first day together. He remembered making the decision to tell her that he was human. He had literally put his life in her hands. He had trusted her then, he knew he could trust her now.

"I am what they call a jinchuuriki," he said quietly. "I have within my body nine tailed fox demon Kyuubi." He stared at her face worriedly, waiting for reaction.

She took the news stoically. "Please continue," she said serenely.

"On the night I was born the village was attacked by the demon. No mortal power could fight against the Kyuubi. So the greatest ninja of the village, the Yondaime Hokage decided to seal the demon into a baby, me. And so..."

He told her the story. He did not mention certain details such as the fact the Yondaime had been his father. He also left out exactly what happened on his eighth birthday. But otherwise he told her all about how he had been given the Kyuubi and just how it had affected his life. She listened to all of it without interruption, calmly sitting there patiently with rapt attention.

"I see," she finally said when he was done. "So with the exception of your third Hokage and your teacher everyone reacted to the power inside you with an unreasoning fear and hate."

He nodded. "Pretty much."

"And you were afraid I would react in the same manner?"

He again nodded.

She put her hand up to his forehead and flicked a finger in the spot just below his hitai-ite.

"Ow!" he looked at her in surprise. "What was that for?"

"Baka," despite trying to sound angry she wore a light smile. "Did you really think I would hate you simply for having a great power hidden within? I understand what it is like to face unreasoning fear and prejudice simply for being too powerful."

"So... so you really don't hate me?"

"Of course not, the fact you were willing to expose this secret to protect me makes me think more of you, not less." He let out a

relieved breath. "However, I think it would be best to keep this a secret, even from Kurumu and Yukari."

"Well I'm not going to tell anyone. But do you think they would hate me if they found out?"

"No," Moka replied. "But the reaction of the rest of the student body might not be so positive." She suddenly yawned and slumped forward against him. "Ah, it seems I truly am exhausted." Her head was resting on his shoulder. "Uzumaki Naruto I," yawn. "Need to ask a favor of you."

"Anything Moka-san."

She looked up at him with a slight grin. "Please help me to remove my clothes."

"What?!" Without even realizing it the shock of her request caused his transformation to end and he again took on a human appearance. "Is... is this some kind of trick?"

"No, this is no trick. I have already told you I will need to sleep for the next two or three days. I am exhausted and will need to remove these wet clothes before going to bed. I simply ask for your aid in this task."

He turned a deep shade of red just thinking about it. "I, uh, I don't know..."

"Does the thought of seeing my naked body offend you?"

"No! But doesn't the idea of me... well, doesn't it bother you?"

Her smile widened a bit. "No, for I trust you."

He actually had to carry her into the bedroom; she was too weak to do more than stand. Though he knew the circumstances Naruto

couldn't help but feel like a new husband bringing his bride to the marriage bed.

With his hands trembling a bit he then helped her remove all of her wet clothing. He tried to be a gentleman; he did not say anything and did not allow his hands to wonder any where they didn't belong. He tried not to stare, but there was no way for him *not* to see all of her. Her body was absolutely amazing, every inch firm and supple. She was not quite as voluptuous as Korumu, but there was nothing to complain about in any area.

"All ri... right I gu... guess I better go." He had done as she asked and now she was standing there naked in front of him.

Before he could leave she leaned forwards pressing herself against him. Her body was so incredibly warm and firm. She brought her lips to his ear and whispered to him. "There is one last thing before you go."

"Ye... yes?" His heart was pounding and he was holding his hands out not sure what to do with them. A thousand possibilities were flashing through his head.

He could feel her hot breath against his skin as she spoke. "From now on, you have permission to call me Moka-chan." She let go of him and slipped into her bed and beneath her covers. "Good night Naruto."

"Good night Moka-chan!" He turned and fled her bedroom as fast as he could before he did something he'd regret.

Watching him run away the adult Moka smiled and laughed herself to sleep.

The great Lord Kyuubi

"Boring, boring, boring," he muttered to himself. Moka had told him she would need to spend the next few days sleeping so he hadn't been surprised when she wasn't there to work out with him. What had surprised him was that he'd grown so used to having her there with him. He'd spent years working out alone after Iruka got recalled. He'd always been fine with it. But now he found himself missing having her there beside him. The morning workout just wasn't the same.

Of course there was something else on his mind. He'd barely gotten any sleep last night. He'd been thinking about Moka's gorgeous pale body and the feel of her skin as he'd slowly slipped off her clothing. He'd thought about that wonderful pressure as she'd leaned into him. He thought of delicious scent and of the warmth of her breath against his skin. He thought about the way she smiled at him. Never the big open smiles that teenage Moka gave him. The adult Moka had these slight grins and smirks that always seemed to hint at more.

He loved teen Moka, he loved her warmth her openness and her kindness. But it seemed that her adult version kept praying on his mind. There was something about the older Moka that just drew him in. She was powerful and fearsome and he always felt that he had to earn what he got from her, she was a challenge.

Being so drawn to the adult Moka he almost felt as though he were being unfaithful to the younger version. He knew that wasn't the case since they were both the same person, and shared the same memories. Still, he felt a little guilty at being so into the adult Moka. "Is it possible to cheat on a girl with the same girl?"

He shook his head. This was pointless; he couldn't do anything about Moka right now anyway. There was something that he could deal with however. It was something he'd been avoiding for a long

time. But now he would face it head on. He sat down beneath a tree in the lotus position and shut his eyes. He calmly began to meditate and focus inward. *All right you damn fox; the warden wants to have a word with you.*

Naruto found himself in the middle of a vast cemetery. *Well I wasn't expecting this.* He got up and began walking around to try and find the fox. As he searched he glanced over at some of the tombstones.

'Here lies Uzumaki Naruto, murdered by the people he tried to serve.'

'Here lies Uzumaki Naruto, unloved, unmourned, and forgotten.'

'Here lies Uzumaki Naruto, whose death was a source of great joy.'

All the tombstones were similar, all of them recording some tragic end. "You know," he shouted. "I go to a school filled with monsters and I've had an entire village hate my guts. If you want to scare me you'll have to do a lot better than this."

From somewhere up ahead of him laughter rumbled. **Oh don't blame me. Everything you see here comes from your own mind.** There was fresh laughter. **I'd say you have a poor outlook.**

"Yeah well having a demon inside your guts will do that to a guy." He followed the sound of the voice to a large decrepit mausoleum. The entrance was barred by a rusted iron gate with a single paper seal placed on it. Beyond the gate there was only darkness. "I want to have a talk with you."

I imagined that you did human. After all this is the first time you've called on me. But really, shouldn't you be thanking me first?

"Thanking you?!" He shouted. "For what? Destroying my life? Making my whole village hate me? Killing my parents?"

Two large orange eyes suddenly appeared in the darkness behind the gate. **For giving you power when you needed it.**

"I'm not thanking you for that! So far as I'm concerned that's the very least you owe me after all the grief you've caused."

You know human, I don't think I care much for your attitude. I am the great Lord demon fox Kyuubi, show me proper respect.

Naruto smiled. "Fuck you."

What did you say? The Kyuubi growled.

"I said fuck you!" Naruto shouted at him. "You're the great lord of nothing now! All you are is a prisoner inside my belly!"

Beneath the eyes two rows of jagged teeth appeared. **Have a care how you speak to me mortal or you will regret it!**

"How? What are you going to do to me?" Naruto demanded. "Make people hate me? Force me to live all alone? Send me to a place filled with monsters that think of me as a, 'half breed' and occasionally try to kill me? Oh wait! You've already done all that! Face it; you've already caused me as much harm as you can."

You have no idea what I can do to you mortal worm.

"Save it," Naruto replied unimpressed. "I know all about how the seal works. You can't control me or hurt me unless I allow it. And hurting me doesn't really help you anyway, since if I die you die."

He heard the Kyuubi growl. **I cannot let you die, that is true. But I can let you suffer. Perhaps the next time your mate is in danger I won't give you any of my power until your own life is in jeopardy.**

"If Moka dies because you won't give me power when I need it I'll kill myself."

The Kyuubi glared down at him. They both knew he was speaking the truth. **What do you want human?**

"I want you to give me free access to your power whenever I need it."

No.

"The stronger I am the better chance I have of surviving." Naruto argued. "It's in your own interest to give me more power."

It is in my own interest to keep you alive. If you have too much power you will be all the more likely to kill yourself. The Kyuubi paused, and Naruto got the sneaking suspicion the fox was plotting something. **However, there might be a way for you to gain greater access to my power safely.**

The sudden friendly tone set off all sorts of alarm bells. But he was still interested. "I'm listening," Naruto said warily.

Listen carefully; you will need to do exactly as I say.

Naruto opened his eyes and was once again beneath a tree. "Damn baka fox," he muttered. "And I've got to be an even bigger baka to think about listening to him." He stood up and began heading back to the dorm.

On his way back he decided to take a slightly different more, 'scenic' route. He went by a spot with a large pond that actually had living trees and vegetation. The sun was just rising and it was pretty. It being so early in the morning he'd expected to have the whole area to himself. He was a bit surprised to see a girl standing on the water's edge skipping stones.

She had purple hair and was wearing a very casual outfit that included purple and white stockings. As he was running past she

turned around to look at him. She seemed to have a lollipop in her mouth; he thought she looked kind of cute, though nowhere near Moka's league.

He flashed her a big smile and waved as he ran past. "Good morning!"

The girl gawked at him in obvious surprise. She didn't say anything but managed to raise a hand in a half hearted gesture as he went by.

Kind of cute but shy, he decided. As he ran past he forgot about her as he had many things on his mind.

He first noticed it when he went down to the dorm cafeteria to eat. Conversations stopped and all eyes turned to him. He'd gotten used to getting a few jealous or unhappy looks from people. But this was different. *Everyone* stopped to look up at him. When he sat down at a table the two others sitting there quickly got up to leave. The looks themselves had changed too. He recognized the looks, he'd seen them often enough. *They're afraid of me.*

"Naruto-kun!" As soon as he exited the dorm Kurumu ran up to him. "Are you all right?!" She grabbed his face and shoved it into her chest. "There are some crazy rumors going around."

"You're smothering him you big chested bimbo." Yukari said.

Kurumu released her death grip and Naruto took a moment to regain his breath. "What sort of rumors?"

"There's talk that you were attacked by a bunch of rogue monsters and that you killed one of them after getting a demonic aura. The whole school is talking about it." Kurumu said. "It's not true is it?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Yukari said. "Only the most powerful monsters have demonic auras. A human can't have one!"

"So you weren't attacked yesterday?" Kurumu asked.

The girls were putting him in a tight spot. He'd been planning to tell them nothing at all about the fight, and to say that Moka had left the academy for a few days. But if the whole school already knew...

"Let's go somewhere quiet and talk."

They both looked stunned.

"So you wound up rescuing Moka and killing their leader?" Kurumu said amazed.

"And Moka-chan is really all right?" Yukari said worriedly.

"Yeah, I really did that, and Moka-chan is fine. She just needs to sleep for the next few days to recover her strength." He'd told them a carefully censored version of events. A version that left out the Kyuubi's power or the fact he'd seen Moka naked.

"And you don't have a demonic aura, right?" Kurumu asked.

He gave her an easy smile. "I'm human, how could I have one?" Both girls nodded, accepting that.

"So I guess these rumors about you having an aura are just an attack on you," Yukari said unhappily. "What are we going to do about them?"

"We aren't going to do anything. I'll handle it; I've gone through worse so it'll be fine. I don't want you girls getting into any trouble trying to help me."

"But you don't want us to try and defend you from these lies?" Yukari pleaded.

"No," Naruto said firmly. "Once people make their minds up about something it's almost impossible to get them to change. Believe me,

this is something I know about. If you two start trying to argue with people you'll just make yourselves targets. So please don't do anything on my behalf."

The girls were unhappy with that, but finally agreed.

"Well there's at least one good thing about this situation." Kurumu said.

"What's that?" Yukari asked.

Kurumu grabbed a hold of Naruto's arm, careful to make sure her breasts were pressing against it. "Since Moka's asleep I get to walk Naruto to class. Yahoo!"

Yukari immediately grabbed onto his other arm. "Don't get too excited you blue haired cow! He still belongs to Moka!"

That was how he wound up walking to class that day with a pair of girls hanging off of him.

By the time he was done with club activities it was obvious just how much things had changed. People in the hall gave him a wide berth. In class they avoided looking at him. When he did catch them looking they immediately turned away. This was different from how it had been back in the village. Back then he'd seen plenty of fear in people's eyes, but even more hatred. They had been willing to glower at or threaten a small child. Here no one was about to come up to him and scream abuse in his face. It was definitely better than what it had been like in Konoha growing up.

But it was worse than it had been when he was just a, 'half breed.' At least then he was still accepted by the other students. His position was certainly low, but at least he could still interact with them normally. But now he felt like an outcast.

That evening he went out into the woods to find a nice quiet spot.

"I really must be nuts to do this," he muttered.

The problem was he wanted the Kyuubi's power. Having had it once he wanted to be able to call on it whenever he needed. If he was going to survive, if he was going to protect Moka and the others he had to be as powerful as possible. And besides, he felt he had a right to the power inside of him. He'd spent his whole life being made to suffer because he was a jinchuuriki. It seemed only fair he should get the benefits.

He didn't trust the Kyuubi, that went without saying. But it was in the Kyuubi's own interest for him to get stronger. This was a way to do that... maybe. But in any case he was willing to try. He took out a kunai and cut his hand. Ninja had their own way to summon beings. It required a contract and a specific series of hand signs. But the Kyuubi had agreed to lend him the power to summon using the demonic method. He spread some of his blood on the ground and stepped back. He felt the Kyuubi's power suddenly filling him. He felt his face and hands transform and saw the demonic aura once more surround him with a cloak. Moka and the others called it a demonic aura, but in his mind he thought of it as red chakra. Since the Kyuubi had given him the power he needed for this he concentrated and spoke the words.

"Come forth, I summon you."

With a burst of flame and heat a man appeared directly in front of him. He was a bit taller than Naruto and had two weird dots above his eyes. He looked at Naruto in shock that very quickly turned to anger. "Who are you? How did you bring me here?"

"I summoned you," Naruto said calmly.

The stranger stared at him; he could obviously see and feel the demonic aura. "That is impossible! I am Kuyou, a youkai kitsune! Only the great lord himself could summon me!"

I am the great Lord Kyuubi!! A deep voice boomed out. Now kneel before me and hear the commands of your Lord!

Fire and ice

Kuyou stared, not believing. But there was no denying the power he felt, it was definitely the demonic aura of a youkai kitsune. The aura was not that strong; his own true form possessed four tails and was far greater than what he was sensing. There was also the fact that despite the physical transformation the person standing in front of him reeked of humanity. But there was something else in the scent, a bare fragment that was buried beneath that human stink. It was the scent of a kitsune. Illusions could fool the eye. Voices and sounds could be copied. But there was no way to recreate a living scent.

"My family has long served in the royal court," Kuyou said carefully. "If you are truly the great Lord you would know my lineage."

Naruto smiled. It was seriously weird speaking with the fox's voice. It was even stranger to be hearing the fox in his head. He was acting as a translator, giving the guy he'd just summoned the answers he was hearing in order to convince him.

I know you Rikyo Kuyou, son of Keitaro, your family has served me well and faithfully. Now I call upon you to continue that service.

No human could know his clan name or the name of his father. He fell to his knees and cast his face down. "Great Lord I am your humble servant. Command me and I shall obey."

Then listen well and hear how you shall serve me. I am bound within the flesh of this human. It is my wish that he learn the ways of the kitsune and grow strong enough to wield my full power one day. Instruct him and protect him. Treat him with all the honor and loyalty as was shown to the mighty Cadmus.

Kuyou looked up, and there was understanding in his eyes. Naruto got the very definite feeling that he was missing something. "My Lord

Kyuubi I understand, and I shall fulfill your wishes."

Inside his head he heard the fox laughing. **Then I trust you will serve me well.**

Naruto felt the voice in his head fade away. The red chakra disappeared and he transformed back to his normal form.

Kuyou got up to his feet and came forward. "What is your human name? I will not refer to you as Lord Kyuubi." His manner was polite but stiff.

Naruto answered carefully. "I am Uzumaki Naruto."

"And tell me Uzumaki-san, how did the most powerful of all youkai kitsune end up a prisoner in a human boy?" The tone remained polite but the eyes flashed with emotion.

"Sixteen years ago the Kyuubi..."

"Lord Kyuubi!" Kuyou snapped.

Naruto looked up at the tall fellow with the flowing blonde hair. "The Kyuubi," he repeated. "Attacked my village. The most powerful ninja in the village was able to defeat him by sealing him into a human newborn, me."

"I see," Kuyou replied courteously. "Well that does explain why the great Lord has been away for so long. We all knew he was not dead. For so long as he lives no other youkai kitsune can gain nine tails. You must feel most honored; many humans worshipped members of my race as gods. That is what the great Lord Kyuubi is to us, a being of such might and majesty as to be almost godlike. I hope you understand the rare privilege you enjoy being joined to such a divine presence."

Naruto looked at him blankly. "How about we leave my feelings for the Kyuubi out of this. I was told you could give me instruction in how

to access the power inside me safely and at will."

Kuyou nodded. "I will teach you the same lessons I learned as a kit. Despite being human you should still be able to access the power so long as Lord Kyuubi allows it. In time, you will be able to access greater and greater amounts of it. Until the day comes you are able to draw the full limit."

"I'm not really worried about that right now. I'd settle for just being able to draw some of it out whenever I need to."

"Very well, let us begin with your first lesson."

"You mean now?" Naruto asked. "It's kind of late, and I have homework."

Kuyou frowned at him. "The Lord Kyuubi's instructions were clear. I am to teach you the ways of the kitsune. That is infinitely more important than any school work."

"Uhm, well all right," he smiled at the man. "I guess since you'll be my teacher I should call you Kuyou-sensei."

Kuyou shrugged. "You may call me that if you wish."

"And you can call me Naruto if you like."

"No," Kuyou said firmly. "Even if you are nothing more than a lowly human you possess the divine presence of the Great Lord. I shall refer to you as Uzumaki-san."

"You're not exactly social are you?"

Kuyou frowned at him. "Were you not the container of the Great Lord I would want nothing to do with you human. To be blunt I don't think any humans should be at this school even if they are of the border races. Humans are weak, cowardly, and treacherous and are the natural enemies of all monsters."

"I see," Naruto said. "Well all right, but just so you know I won't be inviting you to my next birthday party."

Kuyou gave an annoyed shake of his head. "Let us start with the first most basic lesson. Kitsune are beings of passion and fire. For us our emotions bring out our full strength. But along with that passion must come a level of control." He held out his hand and created a large flame in the middle of his palm. "Fire is our natural element, creating and shaping it are our innate gift." He made the flame blink out. "Now I want you to concentrate on that kindling there and set it on fire."

"And just how do I do that?"

"It's simple, just concentrate on the image of that wood burning and bring a little of the power out. Picture the fire and then make it happen."

"Just make it happen?" Naruto said doubtfully.

"It is easy, now try."

Several Hours Later

A frustrated and annoyed Kuyou glared at him. "Enough! The sun is almost up; we have wasted the entire night on something a newborn can do!"

Naruto gave the man an angry look of his own. He was tired and annoyed and sick of the pointless lesson. "Well maybe if you actually gave me some instruction on what to do I might manage it."

"I have told you what to do a hundred times!"

"Telling me to 'just do it' or 'just bring the power out' is not instruction! If I knew how to do that I wouldn't need a teacher in the first place!"

"Enough of this," he began walking away. "I have other duties I must attend to. We will meet again tonight."

"You know I'm going to need some time to sleep and study."

"With the Great Lord inside you three or four hours of sleep should be all you need. As for your school work you do not need to worry about it any more."

"What does that mean?" Naruto called out but Kuyou did not bother to answer.

Feeling beat and not in a very good mood he trudged back to the dorm. He decided to take the same route as yesterday. As he approached the pond he spotted the same girl from last time. He watched as she skipped a stone across the calm water. He counted each of the skips before the stone disappeared.

"Seven, that's pretty good."

The girl turned around and looked up at him startled.

"Sorry, am I bothering you?"

She slowly shook her head. "No, I'm just not used to having people talk to me."

"Really? I'd think a pretty girl like you would be awfully popular."

She immediately blushed and looked away from him.

Damn it, why do I always say the wrong thing? "Sorry, sorry, I didn't mean to embarrass you."

She looked up at him shyly. "That's all right."

He approached her and picked up one of the pebbles on the ground. "Mind if I try?"

She shook her head.

He reared back and threw the stone as hard as he could. It went straight into the water with a decent size splash.

She smiled a bit. "You really suck at skipping stones."

He gave her an embarrassed nod and rubbed the back of his head. "Aw come on, it's the first time I've ever tried this."

She looked down at the ground and picked up a smooth pebble. She carefully placed it in his hand. "Your angle is all wrong, you need to try and throw it so it hits the water almost flat. Don't throw it too hard, just relax and toss it."

He nodded and gave it another try following her instructions. This time the pebble did skip, it bounced across the water three times before disappearing. He turned to smile at her. "Hey, you're a pretty good teacher."

She blushed again. "Hmmm, thank you."

"You wouldn't know anything about how to make fire would you?"

She stared at him for a second and then suddenly burst out laughing. He laughed a little too, but didn't think what he'd said was that funny.

"Sorry," she said once she had brought her laughter back under control. "But I'm about the last person who would know anything about making fire."

"I see, well I need to get going and get ready for class. It was nice meeting you. My name is Uzumaki Naruto."

"I am Shirayuki Mizore."

"May I call you Mizore-chan?"

She again blushed at his forwardness. Usually when boys tried to talk to her, her normal reaction was to run and hide. But there was something about this particular boy she just liked. It was almost as though he had a natural gift for making friends. Digging her foot into the sand a bit she managed a slight grin despite her embarrassment. "Sure, if you want."

"Great, and you can call me Naruto-kun if you like." He turned to go. "It was really nice talking to you."

"Hey!"

He stopped and looked back at her. "Yes?"

She hurried up beside him. "Would you mind walking me back to my dorm?" She carefully put a hand on his arm.

He smiled. "I'm always happy to escort a pretty girl and keep her safe."

After a hot shower and big breakfast Naruto stumbled into his home room. He could already tell it was going to be a long day. He was half asleep when there was a slight stir in the classroom. He opened one eye to spot a familiar face. His home room teacher spoke up in a pleased tone.

"Shirayuki-san," Nekonome-sensei greeted. "It's so nice to have you in class finally! Please take any open seat."

The girl nodded and slouched over to a seat near Naruto's. Sitting down she gave him a shy smile. "I never knew we were in the same home room Naruto-kun, I feel lucky."

He returned her smile. "Me too."

Kurumu who was sitting in the seat next to Naruto did not fail to notice this friendly interaction. Before she could comment on it

though the door to the room opened again. This time there was a much greater stir. A man with long blonde hair and a black coat entered the room. Nekonome-sensei's reaction to his presence was definitely a bit nervous.

"How can I help you Kuyou-san?"

He gave her a polite bow and turned to address the class. "I wish to make an announcement. Uzumaki Naruto has just been made a member of the Student Police Committee. I trust you will all treat him with the respect due his new position."

"What?" Naruto sat up, this was news to him. "I'm a member of what?"

Kuyou turned to him and gave him a bow. "I will explain your new position and responsibilities when we meet after class tonight Uzumaki-san." With that Kuyou left.

Naruto looked about, people in the class were all talking nervously, and commenting not only on the announcement but on the respectful treatment Naruto had just received. He looked over to Kurumu.

"What the hell just happened? What is this student police thing?"

She shrugged. "I don't know I've never heard of it before."

"They're a special group of elite students who help keep order and enforce the rules on campus." Mizore spoke up. "They have the power to investigate and even arrest people and hold them. They're kind of scary."

Kurumu frowned at the purple haired girl. "Naruto who is she?"

"This is Mizore-chan," he said simply. "My new friend."

That evening he met with Kurumu and the other four members of the Student Police Committee at their gloomy headquarters.

"What's the big idea of enrolling me in a group without even asking me first?" Naruto demanded.

The other members looked stunned at the belligerent tone, and even more surprised when Kuyou did not tear the arrogant boy apart.

"You should be grateful Uzumaki-san; I don't actually expect you to do anything for the Committee. You can think of the title as honorary. And now that you are one of us you won't need to worry about school work anymore."

"Just what does that mean exactly?"

"The faculty and the Committee share a certain understanding." Kuyou explained. "They realize how many responsibilities we have maintaining the peace and order at this academy, and thus show us a certain amount of consideration."

"Consideration?"

A woman with long dark hair cleared things up for him. "You can stop going to classes now. You'll pass everything with a B even if you never show up to a single class."

"They actually let you get away with that?"

Kuyou nodded. "It is only reasonable wouldn't you agree? This way we do not worry about pointless studies and in return the faculty need not worry about our investigations."

Sudden understanding dawned on him. "The teachers are actually scared of you?"

The dark haired woman smiled nastily. "Anyone with sense would be scared of us."

"In any case Uzumaki-san," Kuyou said. "You no longer need to worry about your school work."

Frowning he turned to leave. "You'll have to excuse me; I need to go study for my biology test tomorrow."

"Why bother?" Kuyou asked. "You'll get a B whatever you put down."

"My orders from the Hokage were to attend this school and pass my classes. That's my mission. A ninja should carry out his mission without looking for or expecting shortcuts. And to be honest, I don't want special treatment."

As soon as he was gone the dark haired woman turned to Kuyou. "Why are we taking that? Especially from a half breed?"

"I am under orders to protect and instruct him Keito. Regardless of what he is Uzumaki Naruto is under my protection, which means he is under the protection of the Committee." He looked at her and grinned. "Is that clear?"

Unhappy she still nodded. "It's clear, even if I don't understand it."

Kuyou nodded, it was enough that he would be obeyed. He thought about the story of Cadmus and the kitsune. It was a favorite tale and every kitsune knew it. Cadmus had been a giant. Hearing that kitsune had great magic he found a young one and swallowed him whole. He immediately gained the use of the fox's magic and over the years grew very powerful. But one day all his great powers disappeared and he began to suffer terrible stomach pains. He watched as a fully grown fox tore its way out of his belly. The kitsune had survived being swallowed and simply waited until the day he could take all the giant's power and escape.

When the Great Lord had mentioned Cadmus he'd understood immediately the hidden instruction. Lord Kyuubi wanted Naruto to, 'grow strong enough to wield my full power one day.' But no human body could ever withstand that much power. At the nine tailed state the body would be fully and permanently transformed into a kitsune's. And no human seal would be able to prevent it. Naruto would cease to exist and the Great Lord would be fully restored. The

challenge would be to keep Naruto alive until he was ready to attempt the nine tail state.

It was possible to have the Great Lord's personality emerge much sooner. Left unmanaged he would have great influence at four tails and likely fully take over at the six tail state. But that would be very dangerous. An uncontrolled transformation might very well kill Naruto and the Great Lord along with him. There was also the possibility of the two psyches being permanently merged together. The idea of the Great Lord being influenced by a human was distasteful in the extreme. No, the safest and surest route was to help Naruto along the path to power. To strengthen and protect him until he was ready for the final step, at which point Naruto would meet his demise and the Great Lord would be reborn.

The following day the bus was making a special trip in from the human world.

"You seem to be handling the journey very well." The bus driver commented.

The old ninja looked up from his notebook. "I've done a lot of traveling and seen a lot of things. This isn't that big a deal to me."

"Oh really?" The bus driver said conversationally.

The spiky haired ninja smiled. "Of course, after all, I am Jiraiya the legendary Toad Sage."

A second seal

Naruto was sitting down to a nice relaxing lunch with Kurumu and Yukari at one of the outdoor tables. His appreciation for his friends had only grown in the last couple days. Just about everyone else was treating him as though he might be contagious. Even the teachers seemed to be wary of him now. It was a real relief to be able to sit down with the two of them and actually be treated like a normal person.

"So when do you think Moka-chan will be back?" Yukari asked.

"Well hopefully either today or tomorrow." Naruto said.

"Naruto-kun, why were you placed on the Student Police Committee?" Yukari asked. "From what I can tell they don't really like people like us. Not only that but normally they only accept the most powerful students as members."

That was a difficult question. "Well it's really sort of an honorary thing. Kuyou was asked to protect me and this was his way of doing so."

"Asked by whom?" Yukari wondered.

"All I can say is it was someone very powerful." Yukari frowned; she was obviously not buying it.

"Say Naruto-kun," Kurumu suddenly spoke. "What do you call that thing you wear on your forehead again?"

"This is a hitai-ite, why?"

She pointed. "Because there's some weird old guy heading this way wearing one too."

Naruto turned around to look. Sure enough, there was an old man with spiky white hair and a red and beige outfit heading straight towards them. He had on a hitai-ite, but it was not a leaf one. The symbol on it read, 'oil.'

The weird guy came straight up to him, though his eyes seemed to be focused on Kurumu's chest. "You're Naruto." He said. It wasn't a question. He held out a sealed envelope to him. "Read this."

Naruto quickly took the envelope and opened it. The letter inside was short and to the point. It also bore the signature and seal of the fifth Hokage. When he was done he looked up at his visitor with surprise. " *You're* Jiraiya? One of the Sannin?" He remembered Iruka's lessons on the exploits of the Sannin.

"I sure am kid. I'm the one and only Jiraiya, famed Toad Sage and author, as well as a legendary lover of women." Though addressing Naruto his eyes remained locked on Kurumu's yellow sweater.

Naruto quickly got up to stand in front of Kurumu. "Hey! Could you at least be a little less obvious you pervert? She's only sixteen."

Kurumu giggled. "Oh you don't need to be upset Naruto-kun. I take it as a compliment. And if he causes me any trouble I'll just charm him and turn him into my slave."

Jiraiya leered at her. "Sounds like a great way to spend the weekend." He gave Naruto an approving grin. "Not too bad kid, you've only been here a few months and you've already got three girls."

"Three?" Naruto was surprised and slightly alarmed. How did he know about Moka?

Jiraiya nodded towards a nearby trash can. "I'm counting the little honey over there who is stalking you."

All eyes turned to the garbage can. A purple haired head popped up from behind it. "Hi."

"Mizore-chan," Naruto said. "What are you doing back there?"

"Having lunch," she answered tranquilly.

"I've got to give you credit kid," Jiraiya said admiringly. "I didn't get my first stalker until I was nineteen." He gave him an obvious wink "So are you dating all of them?"

"No," Naruto said sharply. "I happen to have a girlfriend." At that statement Kurumu looked annoyed, Yukari looked pleased, and Mizore looked very disappointed.

"You've got a girlfriend on top of these three? Nice!" Jiraiya chuckled but then finally seemed to become a bit more serious. "Any way kid, as that letter says I'm here to evaluate your situation and take whatever steps prove necessary. Now we need to go somewhere private where we can talk."

"We can go to my room." Naruto said.

"Fine," said Jiraiya.

"But Naruto-kun lunch is almost over," said Yukari. "What about class?"

"This is an order from my Hokage; it takes precedence over everything else."

Alone together in Naruto's room and away from any pretty distractions Jiraiya became all business. He pointed to Naruto's hitai-ite. "Take that off, you're not a ninja and it's a crime to wear one unless you are."

Naruto crossed his arms over his chest stubbornly. "Iruka-sensei gave this to me and said he considered me to be a ninja. Any way, it might be a crime for me to wear it in Konoha but it's not against the law here."

Jiraiya gave him an annoyed look. "Fine then, wear it if you want, but remember it doesn't change your status in the village. Now let me get to the reason why I'm here. We just received a report that you used the Kyuubi's chakra. I'm here to confirm whether or not that was the case and to get an oral report from you on exactly what happened."

"I see," Naruto answered warily. "Well it's true; I did use the demon's chakra during a fight. I had to, if I hadn't I'd have died."

Jiraiya nodded and took out his notebook. "Go ahead and tell me everything that happened."

Naruto knew that Jiraiya was right and that technically he was not a ninja. But in his own mind he'd been one since the day Iruka gave him his hitai-ite. From that time on he had consciously tried to act as a ninja. Despite the bad memories and hard feelings he was still determined to return to his village and be a fine ninja. His dream was to earn respect. Not from the village or from the Hokage or his fellow ninjas. He wanted to earn Iruka's respect; he wanted Iruka-sensei to be proud of him. That was his dream. His duty as a ninja was to report everything that had happened involving the Kyuubi.

However as Moka had pointed out just a few days ago, trust was a precious thing and not easily earned. Naruto did not trust his village or the Hokage or the stranger standing in front of him (even if he was Jiraiya.) Everything that touched the Kyuubi was dangerous to him and needed to be handled with the greatest of care. There was also the matter of Moka's involvement in the original fight. He would not do or say anything that would put her in danger.

His decision was to tell Jiraiya *most* of what had happened involving the Kyuubi. He described in detail the effects of the transformation

and of gaining the red chakra. He admitted to making contact with the Kyuubi and gave a fairly accurate description of the conversation. But in his version the Kyuubi agreed to aid him directly, he made no mention of Kuyou. Likewise he did not mention Moka at all.

The Sannin listened to everything Naruto had to say while scribbling notes down. When Naruto was done Jiraiya looked him in the eye. "You left some things out didn't you? Tell me everything kid."

"I already have." Naruto said calmly.

"Don't even try kid; I've been interrogating people since before you were born. I can spot a lie a mile away and your story doesn't ring true. What are you hiding?"

"Nothing."

"This isn't a game kid; the Hokage needs to know *everything*. Now what aren't you telling me?"

"Nothing," Naruto remained calm. "I'm sorry if what I've told you isn't what you want to hear."

Jiraiya frowned, he was certain Naruto was leaving something out. "I can arrest you and haul you back to Konoha for interrogation."

"Fine, I'll pack my things."

Jiraiya stared at him and Naruto stared right back. Finally it was Jiraiya who broke eye contact. "All right, but if you should happen to remember something later send a letter out to your old address in Tokyo, we'll receive it. Now take off your coat and shirt."

Naruto looked at him suspiciously. "Why? You into boys too you big pervert?"

"Quiet kid! I happen to be the world's top seal master. I am going to inspect the condition of your seal, and I'm going to give you a

second one that will help you in drawing the Kyuubi's chakra."

"You're kidding! You mean the village is actually going to give me some help?"

"That's right kid," Jiraiya said solemnly.

"Well it's about time," he eagerly began removing his clothes.

"Maybe you can help me with learning jutsus! I..."

"No," Jiraiya said sternly. "I'm not going to teach you anything about any jutsus or give you any information. My mission was to collect your report, check your seal, and add the second seal if you really had accessed the Kyuubi's chakra. That's it; I'm not here for anything else."

"But..." Naruto was eager to tell him about Yukari's book and about the fact that he was learning jutsus on his own.

"No buts kid," Jiraiya cut him off. "The Hokage doesn't want you learning any jutsus until you come home."

"He doesn't?"

"No he doesn't, he wants you to try and develop your ability with the Kyuubi's power but he doesn't want you learning any additional jutsus or ninja techniques. Your ninja training will begin again once you're back in the village. Until then just concentrate on your school work and on developing your demonic abilities, that is why you were sent here after all."

"I see." Naruto was very glad that Yukari's book was well hidden.

Once Naruto's shirt was off Jiraiya did a thorough examination on the seal. He finally nodded in satisfaction. "The seal is holding just fine. Now," he took out a jar of ink and a paint brush. "I'll add the second seal."

The Yondaime's seal had been placed on his belly. Jiraiya's was being carefully drawn on his chest. It was intricate and Jiraiya went about painting it on slowly and carefully.

"Say pervert," Naruto said idly.

"Damn it kid call me Jiraiya, or better yet call me Jiraiya-sama."

"So pervert," Naruto continued. "I want to ask you something."

"What?" Jiraiya continued to draw carefully.

"You were the first one offered the position of fifth Hokage, right?"

"That's right, what about it?"

"I was just wondering, why'd you turn it down? The Hokage is recognized as the most powerful ninja in the village; I can't imagine why anyone would turn that down. I sure wouldn't if it were ever offered to me."

"I turned it down because I damn well knew I wasn't fit to be Hokage."

"But you're a Sannin! Who could be more powerful than you?"

Jiraiya shook his head slightly as he dipped his brush in the ink jar. "Being Hokage isn't just about raw power and fighting ability. It demands something that I was lacking."

"A sense of morality?"

Jiraiya grinned, actually appreciating the dig. "No, though that was the excuse I gave the Council. What I lacked kid was the necessary and vital ability to harden my heart."

"Huh?"

Jiraiya sighed and tried to explain. "A Hokage is not only the strongest ninja in the village. The Hokage is also the one who is responsible for the safety and well being of the entire village. He must make decisions that are for the best for the village as a whole. That often means having to make some cruel choices, sacrificing individuals for the greater good."

Naruto immediately thought of his father and the decision he had made.

"The sad truth is the Hokage must be willing to do terrible things if they lead to a greater good."

"You mean like plant a demon into an innocent baby?" Naruto said dryly.

"That is one example," Jiraiya said quietly. "There are many others. One of the terrible facts about being Hokage is that you must be ready to sacrifice the individual for the greater good. Destroy an innocent man if it saves a thousand others. That's a part of being Hokage and I knew it wasn't in me. I knew the third and fourth Hokages very well. One was my sensei and one was my student. They were both good and decent men. But they both had the ability to harden their hearts when it was necessary. That was just one skill I never managed to pick up. I could never give that sort of order." He added a few more brush strokes. "Though I've done terrible things when receiving such an order." He added quietly.

Before too much longer he was finally done. He put away his ink and brush. " **Seal.**"

Naruto felt a slight burning sensation as the ink was made into a permanent seal.

"How's it feel kid?"

"Not too bad," Naruto rubbed the spot on his chest.

Jiraiya looked at him sadly. "I want you to know something kid. What I did I did under the Hokage's orders. I had no choice. Please forgive me." He made a simple hand sign. " **Pain.**"

"Ahhhh!" Naruto screamed as it felt as though a sword had been slammed into his chest. He collapsed to the floor clutching where the pain was, below his new seal.

Jiraiya ended it after only three seconds. Naruto was still on the floor gasping. "I'm really sorry I had to do that kid. But my orders were that I give you a demonstration."

Lying on the floor Naruto looked up at the old ninja. "Wha... what did you do me?"

"That seal I placed over your heart, I'm afraid I lied about what it was for." Jiraiya answered. "It has nothing to do with gathering the Kyuubi's chakra. It's a variation of the Hyuuga caged bird seal. It can be used to stop your heart as I just did, to inflict pain. It can also be used to destroy your heart and kill you instantly."

Naruto stared up numbly. The sheer betrayal of what had just been done to him... "Why?"

Jiraiya sighed. "Why do you think kid? You've just started to access one of the greatest powers known to man, a power that almost destroyed the village. The Hokage decided that this was the best way to ensure your loyalty."

"I was already loyal! I was going to return and serve the village! Why couldn't I have been given the same chance to prove myself as any other ninja?"

"Because kid none of those other ninja have the power to wipe out the village. Maybe you would have been loyal, but the Hokage decided he couldn't take the chance. And since he uses seals to control members of his own clan it's not really surprising he would decide to use one on you."

Naruto slowly got back to his feet. "Why don't you just go ahead and kill me now then?"

Jiraiya shook his head. "You don't get it do you? The Hokage *doesn't* want you dead! He really does want you to learn how to access the Kyuubi's power while you're here. He wants you to return to Konoha and become a ninja and serve the village. You can become the most powerful weapon in our arsenal. You alone could guarantee Konoha's safety and supremacy."

"And if I ever step out of line you kill me," Naruto said bitterly. "I won't be a ninja; I'll just be a tool or a slave."

"It won't be that bad, you'll get to have a good life. You'll be treated with respect and be really well paid! I'm sure that before long people will see you as a hero."

"A hero?" Naruto laughed cynically. "Heroes act out of their own free will. I've just had mine taken from me."

"Look kid, I'm not asking for your forgiveness or even your understanding. Maybe those things will come in time, but for right now you have to accept this is how things are. Now that new seal is an S-rank secret, you're not to tell anyone about it. Given what it can do you don't want people knowing it exists. Only three people will know about it, you, me, and the Hokage. Not even the Council will know. The Hokage and I will be the only ones who will know how to activate your seal. It will only be used as last resort. So long as you are loyal you have nothing to be afraid of."

"Nothing to be afraid of?" He began laughing.

Jiraiya looked down. He wasn't proud of this and had tried to argue the Hokage out of it. But Hiashi's mind had been set. He relied on seals to maintain the loyalty within the cadet branch Hyuuga. He would rely on one to guarantee Naruto's loyalty.

"If it means anything to you kid, I really am sorry." He turned to go.

"Wait a minute!" Naruto shouted. "Since you've done this to me can you at least do me one small favor?"

Jiraiya turned back. "What sort of favor?"

"Can you give me just five minutes to write a letter to Iruka-sensei and then deliver it to him? I won't mention what just happened to me or anything else that is supposed to be a secret. You can read the letter and make sure there's nothing dangerous in it. I just want to tell Iruka that I'm all right and about how my life is going now."

"Your old sensei really matters to you doesn't he?" Jiraiya felt an old ache as he recalled Sarutobi and how much the old man had meant to him. He shook his head sadly. "All right kid, I'll do one thing for you that I shouldn't. I'll share a piece of information with you." Jiraiya took a deep breath. "Iruka is dead, I'm sorry."

"Wh... what? How... when?"

"Ever since the attack on the village we've been short handed, we've needed everyone to do all that they could. Iruka died on a mission to Wind country a little over two years ago."

"Two years?" His voice echoed. "I couldn't even be told and allowed to mourn for him?"

"The Hokage thought..."

"Go to hell," he turned away from Jiraiya.

Seeing there was nothing more to be done Jiraiya quietly left.

' This isn't official Naruto; technically you are only a citizen of Konoha and will not become a ninja until you return to the village. But, so far as I am concerned you are a ninja. Be strong and remember everything I have taught you and I know we will meet again one day.'

After Jiraiya's visit he had blown off the rest of his classes as well as club and would not be meeting Kuyou. He was standing on one of the academy's roof tops staring at the setting sun. He had his hitai-ite in his hands and was remembering the last words Iruka had spoken to him.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. He thought. I was going to be a great ninja and you were going to be proud of me. How did it come to this?

He was so lost in his own thoughts that he didn't hear the door to the roof open or the steps approaching him. The first he noticed was when he felt two arms wrap around to embrace him.

"Naruto-kun!" A sweet voice shouted his name. "I've been looking everywhere for you! Why weren't you in class or club?"

He turned around to look into the face of his beautiful girlfriend. She was in her teenage form with her long flowing pink hair and innocent green eyes. Smiling he wrapped his arms around her and returned the embrace pulling her tight. "Sorry about that Moka-chan, I just decided I needed some time alone. How long have you been awake?"

She pressed her face into his neck. His delicious scent set her mind at ease. "About two hours, I've been looking for you this whole time."

"I'm sorry if I made you worry Moka-chan," he said tenderly.

"It's all right," she said and pressed her self against him. "Now that we are together again everything is all right."

He held her for awhile in a warm comfortable silence.

"Moka-chan?"

"Yes?"

"Do you remember asking me about my future plans? How I told you I was going to return to Konoha and be a ninja?"

"Mmmm, yes, what about them?"

He let go of his hold and held out his hitai-ite to her. "This is a symbol of my loyalty to my village." In his other hand he took out a kunai. In a clean and certain slice he cut a deep slash right along the middle of the metal plate, cutting the leaf symbol almost perfectly in two.

"What are you doing?" She wondered.

"This is what ninja do when they decide to go rogue and become missing nin. It means I no longer bear any loyalty to Konoha."

She was not upset by this sudden change of heart, but she was surprised. "What's changed?"

"I had a little visit today..." He opened up his shirt to reveal the new seal that was over his heart. He told her everything. And as he did so he saw a look come over her face that he hadn't seen there before. Though he'd seen it on the adult Moka more than once. It was a look of pure fury.

"How could they do that to you?! How could they be so faithless?" She looked and sounded absolutely livid.

"It's because they don't really want me as a ninja," Naruto said dully. "They want me to be an obedient slave."

"I hate them!" She said suddenly and with real passion. "I hate that they could hurt someone as kind and decent as you Naruto-kun, and do it so callously. I really do hate them."

"Good," he slowly nodded. "Because I hate them too." He gave her a wicked, and slightly fox like grin. "And one day I swear I will pay them back everything I owe them."

Plans and strategies

They were in her room on the couch. She was curled up on his lap and they were having a rather intense make out session. His mouth eagerly explored hers as his hands caressed her underneath her shirt. When his hand rubbed her in just the right way she would give out tiny gasp of pleasure. After telling her what had happened she had insisted that he come back with her to her apartment so she could console him. Naruto decided that this was one of the best parts about having a girlfriend. If he'd still been alone he'd have spent the night moping feeling sorry for himself. Maybe he would have worked out some to get rid of a little of the frustration. *This is soooooo much better.*

After a very satisfying time Moka rested her head against his neck and let out a contented sigh. Naruto, being a sixteen year old boy, would have liked to have done quite a bit more. But he was sure that if he even tried it the other Moka would end his life even before his village could.

"Naruto-kun," Moka spoke up while continuing to rest against him. "Did you find anything useful in the book?"

He glanced at the book that was lying open on a small coffee table. He had insisted on going back to his room to retrieve it. "Not really, there's only a small entry on the Hyuuga caged bird seal, not even a half a page. It doesn't mention anything about how the seal is applied or if it can be safely removed. There was one interesting thing though."

"What's that?" She asked and began to nuzzle his neck.

"It specifically mentions that for the seal to be activated the subject must be in the line of sight of the user. That at least means the Hokage can't just kill me while he's sitting in his office. Someone would have to be sent here to do it." He shrugged. "That's still not

really great news; it means anyone who is taught the proper hand sign can execute me as soon as they see me."

She looked up at him nervously. "So what are you going to do?"

He bent his neck to give her a quick kiss. "For right now? Nothing."

"Nothing?" She sounded surprised. "But didn't you say you no longer had any loyalty to your village and that you were going to be a rogue ninja?"

"I did say that, and I meant every word."

"Then how can you do nothing?"

"For the time being it's the best course of action. I may have decided to go rogue, but right now only the two of us know that. The Hokage and Jiraiya and all the rest are probably convinced they have me right where they want me. They're probably 100 percent sure I'll do whatever they say. So that means so long as I keep playing the part of the obedient little soldier they'll leave me alone. If I up and leave though they'll send hunter nins after me, and you can bet every one of them will know the secret hand sign to kill me. So I'll stay right here and play my part until I accomplish two things."

"What two things?"

"Well first I have to get this damn seal removed. Until that's done I really am at the Hokage's mercy." He sighed. "The problem is I don't know much about seals except the basics. And since Jiraiya is a seal master I seriously doubt what he put on me will be easy to get rid of. To be honest I'm not even sure where to start."

"Could you try asking the Kyuubi or Kuyou?"

Naruto shook his head. "No! Definitely not! I wouldn't trust anything that damn fox tells me about removing seals. He would definitely try and trick me into removing or at least weakening his seal while

getting rid of the other one. I trust Kuyou only a little more, but that's only because he can't kill me without killing his precious, 'Lord Kyuubi.' But even if he knows about seals I wouldn't trust him not to try and mess with the main one while pretending to help with Jiraiya's."

"Well what about asking Yukari-chan?"

He frowned. "Maybe... but from what I've seen her magic has nothing at all to do with chakra. I doubt she would know anything."

"Maybe she has a book that could help."

He thought about it. "Well you know that's a good idea. It's at least worth asking about. Though I'll have to be very careful about how I ask, I don't want her asking me too many questions."

Moka looked a bit sad. "You're not going to tell her about what happened to you?"

"No I'm not," Naruto said firmly. "You're the only one I trust with this. So far as Yukari and Kurumu-chan are concerned I had a pleasant chat with the pervert who came here just to check up on me."

"I don't think either of them would ever betray you Naruto-kun."

"I don't think so either, but even though I like and care about them I'm not ready to trust them with my life." He bent down and kissed her again, this time it was a deeper and much slower kiss. "You're the only one I'll trust completely. I love you Moka-chan and I trust you with my life."

She felt warmth fill her heart. She leaned forward and gave him a kiss of her own. "I love you too Naruto-kun, and I will never abandon or betray you." She was a little sorry that she couldn't talk to Yukari and Kurumu about this, but at the same time she was happy to know he trusted her more than anyone else. "You know I think I may know

somewhere we can go to get help with your seal. Do you feel like taking a trip with me to the world of Djin Sunday?"

He looked at her. "Is it safe?"

"Absolutely safe! Just as long as you don't say anything and let me do all the talking."

"Uhm, o.k. I guess."

"So removing the seal is one thing. What's the other?"

"I need more of the Kyuubi's power. From everything I've read and from the stories Iruka told me it's obvious I've only just scratched the surface of what's locked inside me. I also need to be able to draw it at will and not just when the damn fox lets me. When the day comes that I settle accounts I'll need to be able to use all of the Kyuubi's power."

"What happens when you've done those two things?"

"Then it will be time for me to leave here." He looked down and saw she was worried. "When that time comes... will you come with me?"

"Yes," she said instantly.

"Don't you want to think about it? You don't have to answer right..." he was abruptly cut off when she put a finger on his lips.

"I don't need to think about it Naruto-kun," she said serenely. "I love you. Since we've been together I haven't felt lonely. I don't care where we go or what hardships we face. I'll be happy just so long as I can be with you."

He smiled down at her, feeling relieved that they could be together. He loved her; as long as he could be with her he was sure he could face anything. "Moka-chan..." he said tenderly.

"Naruto-kun..." she pressed her face against his neck. "Mmmm, you smell sooooo good."

He chuckled a little knowing where this was leading. "Go ahead."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

"Thank you Naruto-kun!" She eagerly bit him.

Despite the pain he smiled as his beloved girl sucked out his blood.
The things we do for love.

Jiraiya was glad to be back in the village and off that weird, 'bus' thing. Give him the back of a frog any day. Strolling through the gates everyone was happy to see him. Ninja and citizens alike greeted him and welcomed him back. Ever since the attack that had killed the Third he'd been leading the fight to avenge Sarutobi. The war that had been going on between his village and the villages of Sand and Sound had been long and bitter. For the first couple of years they'd been forced on the defensive mainly due to the power of that psychopath Gaara. The brutal power of the one tail had been one of the reasons the fifth had decided to send Naruto to Youkai academy in the hopes he would learn to draw out his full potential. Gaara was an example of the best and worst possibilities of a jinchuuriki. On the battlefield there was no denying his presence was an awesome factor. But he was feared by his own people, he'd even been feared by his father and siblings. The fifth wanted that kind of power fighting for Konoha, but he did not want an uncontrolled psychopath roaming the streets.

Jiraiya had been the only one capable of fighting Gaara on anything close to equal terms. The first time they'd met had been on the day of the sneak attack. Gaara had already been wounded by Sasuke and Jiraiya had beaten him easily. His swift defeat had infuriated Gaara and left him even more unstable and dangerous than before.

They'd met in battle several more times after that. Each time Jiraiya had triumphed, but each time it had gotten harder and harder as Gaara learned from his failures and grew more powerful.

Being forced to split their efforts with Sound in the north and Sand in the south things had looked bad for awhile.

At least until Gaara's assassination by Akatsuki. That had changed the course of the war. With Gaara and the Shikaku gone Konoha had gone over onto the offensive. They were closing in on Suna and would be able to put the place under siege soon. Once Sand was gone they would be able to finally commit their full resources to exterminating the snake that had killed Sarutobi -sensei.

"Sensei, it's good to see you."

Jiraiya looked up to see his apprentice coming up to him. "Hello Sasuke, did you manage to stay out of trouble while I was gone?" Despite not intending to that had come out with a sarcastic edge to it.

Sasuke was used to it from his teacher and simply ignored it. "I did, I managed to control myself for a whole day. So are we going on a mission to Wind or Sound? Or are you finally ready to let me sign the toad summoning contract and actually work on that?"

Jiraiya frowned at the young Jonin. There was no denying Sasuke's skill or courage; he'd successfully completed fifteen S and A rank missions. People talked of him as the second most powerful ninja in the whole village, behind only his teacher. Yet despite all that there was just something about his apprentice that he couldn't completely trust. Despite all the courage he'd shown fighting for Konoha there was something still brooding inside the boy. He still saw himself as an avenger whose purpose was to destroy his brother and repopulate the Uchiha clan. Those were his priorities. And though he never came out and said it Jiraiya was certain all his effort at becoming stronger was so he could kill Itachi one day. Serving the village was secondary to that.

"I've told you before," Jiraiya said coolly. "Being my apprentice doesn't entitle you to sign the contract. I'll let you sign it when and if I think you're ready."

"The Hokage thinks I'm ready." Sasuke said with a slight smirk.

Jiraiya stopped to smile back at him. "The Hokage doesn't decide this. It's one of the few things the Hokage does not have the authority to decide. The person holding a summoning contract has always had the right to decide who does and who does not sign the contract. Just be glad the Hokage forced me to make you my apprentice."

Sasuke looked unhappy. "Are you still complaining about that? Aren't you finally willing to admit it was a good idea? Haven't I been a great student? Haven't I been a great ninja? What more could you ask for?"

"Someone who doesn't think he's owed whatever he wants just because of his clan name!" That had always bothered him about Sasuke. He demanded power and just assumed being given it was his right. For some reason he thought of Naruto then. The kid had really had it rough, but even after what had been done to him he'd still cared about his sensei. Sasuke would only have cared about himself. *I wonder what the kid would say if I offered to teach him when he came back to the village?* But remembering what had happened Jiraiya could only shake his head. *He'd probably tell me to go to hell; he'd certainly have the right to.*

Before he could say anymore a pair of high pitched squeals cut him off.

"Sasuke-kun!!" two girls cried out in unison. Immediately a pink haired and blonde haired girl fell on Sasuke like a couple ravenous wolves. From what he could tell these two had been infatuated with Sasuke since they were children. The pink haired one had even been him teammate for awhile. Sasuke had never shown any interest in either of them, but neither of them had cared. As Sasuke's

reputation had grown so had their shameless determination to win his attention.

Jiraiya found both teenage girls quite attractive. Normally he would be highly entertained by the sight of two such beauties fighting for a man. But since becoming Sasuke's sensei he'd been forced to endure endless rounds of their mindless, 'Forehead girl' 'Ino-pig' shouting matches. He had long since come to agree with his student. Even if they were attractive, they were both annoying.

"Have fun with your fan girls Sasuke, I have to report to the Hokage."

The great Jiraiya did not have to wait to see the Hokage. Upon entering the Hokage's office He gave his leader a slight bow.
"Hokage-sama."

The Hokage nodded to him respectfully. "Jiraiya-san."

The way he greeted the Hokage said a lot about his relationship with the Fifth. He had always called Sarutobi old man, and Minato had always been kid. There was no such familiarity and warmth between him and Hiashi. There was respect and a certain amount of trust, but the relationship was strictly a professional one.

"I have the written report." He placed it on the Hokage's desk in front of him.

"I am eager to read it," the Hokage told him. "But give me a quick synopsis. Is it true that he used the Kyuubi's chakra?"

Jiraiya nodded tiredly. "It is, and per my orders I placed the second seal on him and demonstrated its effects. He now understands his situation."

"Good," Hiashi nodded. "I am very pleased to know that situation has been dealt with and is now in hand."

"It could have been dealt with differently." Jiraiya said.

"I won't have a psychopath jinchuuriki running wild in Konoha as Gaara did in Suna. Especially not when his potential for destruction is so much greater."

"There has never been anything to suggest Naruto is a psychopath or even that he is mentally unbalanced. Given everything he has endured I'd say he is actually quite well adjusted."

"Or perhaps, he was on the verge of snapping one day."

"We could have brought him back and given him a real chance. If there had been problems I could have planted the seal *then*."

"Given what he is even one problem might have been disastrous." Hiashi shook his head. "There's no more point in arguing this now, it's done."

"Yes it is, and kami help us if that boy ever tries to get revenge against us." Jiraiya said quietly.

"If he turns on us he will meet a swift end, thanks to your seal. Now tell me, how close is he to wielding the full power of the Kyuubi?"

"He's nowhere near that. From what he described to me it seems he reached only the first tail state."

"That is a pity, but still it is a promising start. Hopefully he can reach his full potential within the next three years."

"I want to renew my request that he be brought back to the village. I'd be willing to train him myself."

Hiashi shook his head. "Denied, we have already discussed this option. You have admitted to me you doubt you could get him beyond the four tail state without risking death or his loss of control. The information I have about his current location leads me to believe that he will receive greater instruction there and eventually reach the

nine tail state. Until he reaches that point Uzumaki Naruto will remain where he is."

"Then can we at the very least give him some information about what's going on and the danger he is in? He doesn't even know we've been at war for the last four years. Not to mention he knows nothing of Akatsuki or the threat they pose to him. According to my informants they have extracted seven of the Biju, though for what purpose we still don't know. Only Naruto and the eight tail remain."

"There is no reason for Naruto to know anything about this war or our current situation. Let him remain blissfully ignorant, that will surely make it easier for him to concentrate on gaining the Kyuubi's power. As for Akatsuki there is no reason at all to panic him. His location is our most highly guarded secret. Even if they somehow learned of it Youkai academy is almost impossible to reach without aid. He is far safer where he is now than if he were brought back here. My decision is made Jiraiya-san; Naruto stays where he is until he has the Kyuubi's full power."

Jiraiya knew that Hiashi's mind was made up. Even if it wasn't in his heart Jiraiya knew it was already too late. The chance Naruto might truly come to care for and *want* to protect the village had been destroyed by his own actions.

By what he had done to his own godson. *Please forgive me fourth Hokage.*

I take you as my

"So Yukari couldn't help?" Moka asked.

"No, I'm afraid it turns out the book she gave me was the only one her family had that focused on ninja. Apparently witches don't have much interest in jutsus or chakra."

"Was she curious why you were asking about seals?"

"A little bit, I covered myself by saying I was interested in any books she had that touched in ninja abilities. She seemed to accept that."

"Does it bother you at all that we're telling so many lies to our friends?"

"Not really," Naruto admitted. "I've had to lie about almost everything since the day I left Konoha. Frankly, I've told so many lies over the years it's being honest that seems weird." He shrugged. "Any way in the ninja world being deceitful isn't really seen as a negative, unless you're lying to your own superiors." He glanced out the bus window at the total darkness they were traveling through. "So are you sure this place is safe for us to visit?"

Moka nodded enthusiastically. "Of course it is! It's absolutely safe! Just don't talk to anyone, and especially don't make any promises or agreements. Where we're going you will be held to your words even if they aren't what you meant."

The bus came out of the darkness and onto a high plateau. "Here we are," the bus driver called out. "I hope you find what you are looking for. Please be careful when exiting the bus." He looked directly at Moka. "So you will not need me to return you?"

"Oh no, thank you bus driver-san." Moka said.

"Wait a minute," Naruto spoke up a bit nervously. "How are we supposed to get back?"

"No need to worry young man," the bus driver said. "She knows the way."

Moka stepped off the bus first. The instant she did so she was surrounded by a demonic aura and quickly transformed into her adult self.

Naruto was caught completely off guard by this and stared at her as the bus pulled away. "Nani?! But you still have the rosary on. How can you change?"

The adult Moka gave him an amused look. "I see the other Moka neglected to mention there are some powerful magics in play on this world. They are far more powerful than the magic used in the rosary. So long as we are here in this world the rosary's power will be suppressed."

"Hmmm, well I suppose that's a good thing. I mean it's a lot safer being with this version of you."

"True," she answered. "Let's head towards Azkarra."

Walking side by side they headed towards the settlement out in the distance. As they traveled Naruto was surprised to note that Moka seemed to be in a rather pleasant mood. That should have been enough to tell him he was in trouble.

"So you are a liar." She said in an agreeable voice.

"Huh?"

"On the bus, did you not say that you lie so much you find being truthful strange?"

He looked over at her feeling a bit worried. "The way you say that you make me sound like a dishonest person."

"Are you not?" Moka asked. "As someone who constantly tells lies are you not by definition dishonest?"

"Now hold on, it's not like I had a choice most of the time. For someone like me the truth can be dangerous. Besides when I went to Tokyo I was given a cover identity and I had to lie."

"But you often lie even when you do not need to." She gave him a meaningful look. "Have you ever lied to me?"

No, he meant to say. "Yes," he did say. What the hell?! Why did I say that?

Her pleasant mood seemed to disappear and she was now eying him as if she were a cat and he were a mouse. "I see, you should be aware Uzumaki Naruto that I detest liars."

"But when I lied to you I was only trying to protect you or protect my pride. I never told you any big lies."

"Really?" She asked coolly. "Were you being truthful all the times you told the other Moka you loved her?"

"Yes! I love her with my whole heart and have never loved anyone the way I do her."

"I see," her manner seemed to soften just a bit. "What do you think of Kurumu?"

I think of her as nothing more than a friend. "I think she's sweet and sexy and I love how she always finds a way to press her tits against me. If I weren't totally in love with Moka-chan I would jump her bones every single chance I got." He stopped walking and literally slapped his hand over his mouth. What is wrong with me?! I actually told Moka I wanted to jump her bones?!

"Is that so?" Moka's voice had a slight edge to it.

"Are you going to kill me?"

"I have not decided yet, though I seem to be leaning in that direction." She got moving and Naruto had to hurry to keep up with her. She was wondering if she really wanted to ask him anymore questions. Because of the enchantments he couldn't lie. If he'd known about them he could have given her careful answers that were truthful but revealed little. But since he was trying to tell her lies he wound up telling her much more truth than he wanted to. Glancing over at him she decided this was too good of an opportunity to pass up. "Have you ever kissed her?"

"No."

"Have you wanted to?"

"Yes," he looked horrified. "But the only girl I really want to kiss is Moka-chan and I would never kiss anyone else while I was with her!"

"I see," she said calmly. "So you truly love my other self?"

"Yes I do."

"And what do you think of me?" She asked quietly. "What do you think of the scary Moka?"

"I love you too," he told her. "I love you because you are still Moka no matter how scary. I also really, really, really want to have sex with you." Naruto once again looked horrified.

"Is that so?" Moka seemed to be amused again. "More than you want sex with Kurumu?"

"A lot more," he admitted. "Ever since that night I took your clothes off I've dreamt about seeing you naked and imagined what it would be like for us to do it." He paused and wondered what sort of curse he was under to keep spewing such things. "You're really going to kill me now aren't you?"

"I am not offended to know that you want my body." They continued walking for a bit. "Why did you ask the other Moka to go with you when you decide to leave the academy?"

"Huh? Because I want us to be together for always."

"You and the gentle Moka you mean?"

"No, me and Moka-chan. I want to be with both of you."

"There is something you should know then, one day the gentle Moka will disappear." She touched the rosary. "The two individuals you call Moka were created by this rosary's enchantment. Neither of us is the, 'real' Moka, though I am far closer to her than my other self. In a sense you have never met, 'Moka.' One day we will both decide to return to our true self. On that day I will destroy the rosary and our two psyches will merge. The gentle Moka you know will be gone."

That was news. Naruto had never even considered the possibility something like that might happen. He had grown used to dealing with her two sides and had assumed that was how things would remain. The idea of never seeing the sweet innocent Moka again left him feeling very sad. It was like being told someone you cared for had a terminal illness.

"But even though she will physically vanish her memories and thoughts will remain. Her love for you will not disappear." They continued to walk in silence for a bit as he thought about that.

"It doesn't matter," he said in a soft undertone.

Despite that she'd heard him. "Are you certain?"

He looked at her. "Yeah I am, I love Moka no matter what form she takes. I like the gentle her and I like the strong her and I'm sure I'll like whatever Moka the two of you become."

Moka gently shook her head. "You cannot know that Uzumaki Naruto."

He looked over at her. "Do you love me?"

A rare look of surprise crossed her face. "That is an irrelevant question. The other Moka loves you, that should be enough."

"So if I were killed or if I just left without you some day you wouldn't care at all?"

"I have already told you, if anything happened to you the gentle Moka's heart would shatter."

"What about your heart? What would you feel?"

"I would feel concern for the other Moka."

"And nothing else?"

She frowned at him and spoke coolly. "I am not the same as the other Moka. My heart is not as gentle and soft as hers."

"Tell me something, why did you put on the rosary originally?"

She hesitated before answering. "It was because I was lonely. I lived with my father and my brothers and sisters in a vast castle. Even though I had family we were not close. My relationship to my siblings was based on rivalry and we were not affectionate. I had a younger sister I made some effort with, but even with her..." She sighed and seemed oddly human for a moment. "Even with others of my own kind I was lonely and so one day I sought out my mother. She gave me the rosary and I decided to attempt to live the life of a young girl in the hopes of finding someone I could care for, someone who would take away my loneliness."

"And are you lonely now?"

She turned her head and looked away. "No."

He smiled at her. "Neither am I."

They walked on towards Azkarra without saying anything more. As they passed the signs Naruto read them out. "Let no lie be spoken. Let no deception stand. Let your wish be fulfilled. Let the price be paid." He glanced over to her. "Let no lie be spoken, huh? You could have warned me."

"True," she admitted with a smirk. "But it would not have been nearly as entertaining." As they entered Azkarra the streets was as packed as on her last visit. And just as before the various beings made a wide berth around her.

"Is this normal?" Naruto asked.

"Yes," Moka said. "Just about all other people avoid vampires. It has always been like this, even with the servants in my father's castle. The boys you worry so much about in school. If they saw me like this they would react the same." She then did something that surprised him. She reached out and wrapped her arm around his.

He looked over at her in surprise.

"Do you object to walking with me like this?" She asked calmly. "Is this a privilege only the other Moka is allowed?"

"No, I'm always happy to be close to you Moka-chan. I'm just surprised that's all."

Walking arm in arm she led them through the crowded streets to their destination.

Melzar frowned and regretfully shook his head. "I am very sorry Akashiya Moka, but I'm afraid there is nothing I can do for him."

"What do you mean nothing?" She demanded. "You have access to powerful magics and artifacts. Surely you have something that can remove a simple human seal."

The Djin smiled at her. "Oh I certainly could!"

"Then do so and we will discuss your price." Moka stated.

"Well part of my price would have to include your friend's life. That seal has been connected to the functions of his heart. If it is simply erased his heart will also be destroyed. I am afraid no general magic will help with this. The only safe way to remove it will be with the aid of a practiced seal master."

"Why am I not surprised that it wouldn't be easy," Naruto muttered.

"If you cannot help me I can take my business elsewhere."

Melzar shrugged. "Go ahead, we Djin grant wishes. None of us bother to study something as mundane as sealing. No one else here will be able to help you I'm afraid."

She let out a low annoyed growl. She damn well knew he was telling the truth. "So there's nothing at all that you can do?"

"Nothing that wouldn't kill him." He looked over at Naruto. "You must be quite an interesting fellow. I never imagined Moka would make one trip here for someone, never mind two. I never knew she was the type to care."

"Watch yourself merchant," she said sharply. "If there's nothing you can do we're done here." She grabbed Naruto's arm and led away from the shop.

As they left Naruto grinned at her. "You came all the way here for me before?"

"It was nothing," she muttered. "This is where I acquired the potion of summoning for you." She looked at him. "I want you to remove my

rosary."

Alert Naruto began looking about at the passing crowd. "Why? Are we in some sort of danger?"

"No, I am about to take us back to the academy. If I have the rosary on I will immediately revert back to the other Moka. There are still some things I need to say and do with you first."

"All right." He removed the rosary and handed it to her.

"Very well I am taking us back now." Without warning she wrapped her arms around him and pulled him tight against her body. In the next instant they seemed to be surrounded by a black fire. And the moment after that they were in her bedroom.

"Whoa! What was that?"

"That was vampiric teleportation. I can travel not only across space but to other worlds as well."

"You know you really should give a guy some warning first." He'd expected her to let go of him now that they were safely back in her apartment. But she continued to hold him tight.

"I love you." Her voice was calm as she leaned in.

"Wh... what?"

"I said that I love you Uzumaki Naruto." Her lips came down on his and her whole body slowly grinding against him. Her mouth and body were eager and he could feel his heart begin to race. He put his own hands tightly around her and tried to somehow create even more friction between them.

When their lips separated her eyes were staring down into his. "I have never spoken those words before, not even to my father. You are the only one who has ever entered my heart." She gently touched his face. "I love you and I will always love you."

"I love you too Moka-chan, and I always will."

She nodded and took his hands, placing them on the buttons of her shirt. "I take you as my lover. Please help me remove my clothes." His hands shaking and memories of the last time running through his head he did just that. But unlike last time once she was naked she began helping him to undress as well.

They then spent the rest of the night making love.

A little favor

Author's Note: I wasn't planning to do this, but given all the complaints about the lack of citrus products I went ahead and put in a short lemon. (Somewhere Jiraiya is doing a victory dance.)

It was the last day of the fall semester. While other students worried about their grades and about going home for the winter break He had other responsibilities and concerns.

He looked over to Kuyou. "I don't want to do this."

Kuyou smiled at him nastily. "Please think of this as good training Uzumaki-san."

Naruto frowned. "This isn't the sort of training I had in mind. Besides, didn't you say I wouldn't have anything to do with the Committee?"

"That was before you asked for our help."

" / didn't ask for it. You know who wants this investigation."

"Yet he did not deign to actually speak to me directly or make the request officially. So far as I am concerned this is being done on your behalf Uzumaki-san. And if you wish for us to continue with this I expect you to participate, not just watch."

Naruto sent him a hard look. "I really hate you."

That only produced a smile. "Hate me all you want, so long as you do as I say Uzumaki-san."

"Bastard..." *Yeah, but what kind of bastard am I?* "Fine then." He held out his right hand. On the tip of index finger a small fire came to life. The flame was a pure orange which meant it was nice and hot.

He turned to the only other person in the tiny underground cell.
"Save us all a lot of trouble and just tell us what you know."

Moroha looked at him with despair. He was naked and chained up to the cell wall. All over his chest, arms, and legs there were burn marks. "Please let me go! I've told you everything I know, I swear!"

"Oh, I believe you. But I'm afraid Kuyou doesn't. So until you give us the name of your leader we'll have to continue this."

"But I don't know it!" He cried out. "Our leaders always hid themselves! The highest one in the organization I knew was Midou!"

"Well since he's dead that doesn't do us or you much good now does it?"

"Please, I don't know anything I swear! Please just show me mercy!"

"Mercy?" Naruto asked. "You're my enemy! You became my enemy the second you decided to attack me and Moka. Where I come from enemy prisoners have no rights. Besides," he pressed his finger into the man's shoulder. "I've seen how much mercy you rogue monsters show."

As Moroha's skin began to burn he howled. Naruto tried to think about other things, like how he'd wound up in this situation.

Five Weeks Ago

She stuck her tongue in his mouth. Her tongue pressed against his and seemed to be searching the inside of his mouth. He could feel one hand gripping his hair and the other one she raked across his chest; her finger nails digging into him. All the while she didn't stop for a second, her hips kept going back and forth and back and forth, squeezing him, rubbing him in the most amazing way.

After getting a nice taste she pulled her mouth back and sat back up. He could feel her thighs squeezing him as her motion changed. Now instead she began to slamming her body up and down, forcing his hard dick deep into her wet tight pussy. And as she rode him she looked down at him with a wickedly sinful smile on her face. Just seeing that look made him want to fuck her even more.

He reached up with both hands to grab her big firm tits. He began rubbing them the way he knew teen Moka liked. Though the adult Moka's body was more mature and better developed it seemed to have all the same sensitive spots. He saw her close her eyes and let out a small gasp. As he played with her tits she continued to pound away at him. Her pussy was so wet and so tight it was amazing. Despite the size of his dick he could slide all the way into her with no problem. Her pussy grabbed on and didn't want to let go.

This felt so good!! Her pussy felt so good!! Sex... sex was so amazing!! It was his first time and he couldn't believe what it was like. This feeling...

"Uh, I'm going to..." Naruto grunted.

"Not yet," she began riding him even harder. "Hold on just a bit more."

"I can't..."

"Just a little more," she panted and rode his dick for all she was worth.

He felt her pussy suddenly throb and constrict. That was it. "I'm cumming!" he squeezed her tits as he let go and sent his cum deep into her soaking pussy.

"Ahhhhh!" Moka cried out as a deep full orgasm made her body shake. She felt his hot cum pour into her.

Feeling spent and totally satisfied she lay down on top of him and began to eagerly kiss his mouth. She made sure his dick was still inside her even as his cum began to slowly leak out of her pussy.

After kissing him she rested her head on the pillow next to his. They were both coated in sweat and breathing hard.

"Was that five or six?" Naruto asked. "I think I lost count."

"That was five," Moka answered firmly. "I never suspected humans had this sort of stamina." She began to playfully run a finger over the scars on his cheeks. "If I had I think I'd have taken you the very first time we met."

"I don't think normal guys can go this much," he answered her wearily. "It's nice to know that baka fox is good for something."

"You do know," she said pleasantly. "That now that you are my lover, if you ever abandon me or do this with another woman I will hunt you down and kill you."

He looked at her worriedly. She was still smiling at him and gently touching his face. But he had no doubts that she was absolutely serious. "Does the other Moka count as another woman?"

"No," she actually giggled. "You're free to have your way with her as often as you like, and trust me, she will be very eager to let you." She gave him another kiss. "Now shall we try for six?"

"I don't think I can."

"Oh really?" he felt her mouth nibble at his neck. She moved her face down his chest giving him little kisses and light touches as she went. When she got to his cock he felt her tongue flicker out along the length of it. He then felt as her mouth completely swallowed both of his balls and gently sucked on them as her hands began to rub his cock.

He quickly began getting hard again. As soon as she moved her mouth to begin sucking his dick he let out a low groan. *Damn, I never thought I'd be so glad to have demon's stamina.*

"Where have you two been?" An upset Kurumu demanded.

Naruto looked over at her. He and Moka had been walking together arm in arm. The sun was setting and they had only *just* gotten out. Moka had, had her head resting on his shoulder and her eyes closed. She looked up and smiled dreamily at the other girl.

"Hello Kurumu-chan," Moka spoke in a satisfied voice. "How are you this morning?"

"Morning? It's almost night! What have you two been doing?"

Naruto blushed and looked away. "No... nothing."

Moka simply giggled and put her head back down on his shoulder.

Kurumu's jaw dropped. Somehow she just knew. She pointed at the two of them accusingly. "You two had sex!!"

Naruto's blush deepened. They had indeed, after being up all night taking care of the adult Moka; the teenage Moka had insisted he give her equal time.

Moka let out a contented sigh and answered. "Seven times."

Bam!

"Ow!" Moka lifted her head. She'd just been hit in the face with a snowball. The three of them all looked in the general direction where the snowball had come from.

Mizore stepped out from behind a tree and waved. "Hi."

One Week Later

The two of them were standing in the middle of the woods. It was early evening and it was pouring down rain. He could have been in the dojo working on his fighting skills. Or better yet he could have been in Moka's bed, enjoying another marathon session with his sweet girl. Instead he was standing in the pouring rain with Kuyou. To say he did not want to be there would have been an understatement.

Kuyou pointed at a log. "Light it on fire."

"Are you kidding me?" Naruto snapped. "I can't make fire even under normal conditions. How do you expect me to do it when it's pouring rain?"

As a reply Kuyou held out both hands and fires began to burn in each palm. There was a slight hiss as raindrops struck the flames and evaporated, but the fires kept burning. "For one with the power of a kitsune it is easy! For one who has the power of the Great Lord himself making a bonfire even within a monsoon should be child's play."

"Just because I have the Kyuubi's power stuck inside me doesn't mean I can just use it whenever I want! That's the whole reason I asked for help to begin with. I'm done wasting time with this!" He turned to leave. "You're one lousy teacher."

Kuyou snorted. "Not even the best teacher could teach a pig how to fly."

Naruto stopped and turned around. "What was that?"

"I have told you all that you should need to know!" A disgusted Kuyou replied.

"You haven't told me anything! All you keep saying is, 'just do it.' How the hell does that help when I don't know how to do it in the first

place?"

"A child would be able to understand it!" Kuyou growled. "The power is within you and you have free access to it! All you have to do is draw it out." He had a revolted look. "If you cannot do that much it can only be because of your own stupidity."

"What did you say?!" Naruto demanded and took a menacing step forward.

"I called you stupid! Are you deaf as well?" He took a step forward as well.

Naruto was about to shout something when the log suddenly burst into flame. They both stopped to stare at the burning log.

Kuyou nodded to himself. "Well, it seems my training method finally worked." He was suddenly his usual calm self again.

Naruto glared at him. "You didn't do anything!"

"But I did Uzumaki-san," he said coolly. "I deliberately provoked you and made you angry. We kitsune are beings of passion and fire. We are at our strongest when our passions are their hottest. I thought you would have a better chance of drawing on the power if you were angry."

Naruto frowned at him. "Well I guess it worked."

Kuyou nodded. "You have finally taken the first step in mastering the power inside you."

One Week Later

Naruto struggled but finally collapsed face first into the mat.

"You're not done yet," Kenpachi said. "You've only done forty, you owe me another sixty push ups."

He turned his head to glare at him. "This would be a lot easier if you weren't standing on my back!"

Kenpachi smiled back down at him. "This is your punishment for missing so many club sessions." He let loose a low chuckle. "If you'd rather we can just have an all out sparring match instead."

"Sixty more you say?" With a painful grunt he got back to it.

One Week Later

Naruto headed to their training session with a grim determination. He still did not like Kuyou much, but he was willing to admit he was starting to make some progress. He could start and maintain fires at will, even on his body. He was beginning to figure out how to tap into the Kyuubi's chakra. He didn't care much for the training sessions but was willing to admit they were useful. So when he spotted Kuyou he gave him a friendly wave.

"Hey Kuyou-sensei, I..."

Naruto was caught by surprise as Kuyou launched himself at him and landed a ferocious punch right in his stomach before he could react. With his greater strength Kuyou was able to slam him into a tree. And hold him there.

"Augh," he cried in pain. "What the hell?"

"Tell me Uzumaki-san," Kuyou smiled into his face. "How is that pretty girlfriend of yours?"

"What?" Despite his pain he looked at Kuyou angrily. Kuyou was holding him around the collar with one hand and had one of his wrists in the other. Struggle though he could he could neither get away nor bring his hands together to form hand signs. "What about her?"

"She's very lovely isn't she? I've always liked young girls with nice bodies like hers. It seems like a real waste for her to be with a human like you."

A low growl escaped him. "Don't even try! Moka would never have anything to do with you!"

"Maybe I won't give her a choice Uzumaki-san. Maybe I'll tie you to this tree and pay her a little visit tonight. Maybe I'll just hold her down and make her do anything I want."

"No you won't!" Furious at the threat the power surged through him. In an instant he was surrounded by a demonic aura as his body transformed.

Satisfied Kuyou let go and stepped back. "I see my..."

A fist surrounded by a cloak slammed into his face and sent him flying twenty feet through the air. Landing Kuyou had no chance to even get on his feet before a claw made of demonic aura locked onto his throat and hauled him into the air. Feeling Naruto's killer intent and looking into those murderous red eyes Kuyou realized he might have miscalculated. Naruto was in his one tail form. Kuyou was a four tail youkai kitsune, but that did not help him while he was in his human form.

"Don't ever threaten Moka again, and don't ever touch her. Or I swear I'll kill you!" With ease Naruto slammed him into a tree.

Kuyou fell to the ground. He looked up at a still furious Naruto and smiled. "You do realize this was training Uzumaki-san? You just managed to activate your demonic cloak, and all it took was a little threat to your girlfriend."

Naruto fiercely stared down at him. His killer intent had not lessened. "I know it was your sick idea of training. That's the *only* reason I don't kill you right now. But let's get something straight, you will never mention Moka again."

"Such anger, such passion, that girl is quite a weak spot for you isn't she?"

"Just remember what I told you." Naruto left.

Kuyou watched him go. He would have to begin taking more precautions when dealing with Naruto. But it was interesting to know his weakness.

One Week Later

Naruto was just leaving his dorm when four men in black trench coats surrounded him.

"Come with us Uzumaki Naruto." Four swords came out and were leveled at his throat.

"What are you doing?" Seeing him threatened Moka came forward.

"No need for concern," one of them said. "He is not in any danger."

"Just who are you?" Naruto demanded.

"We are the elite body guard. Uzumaki Naruto, you will come with us, you are summoned to meet the Headmaster."

Meeting in the Headmaster's office, in his private home, Naruto was a bit nervous. He had no idea why he was here. The man himself was not what Naruto had expected. The man was dressed in a white robe that reminded Naruto of something a priest or monk might wear. There was also the fact he had weird glowing eyes like the bus driver's.

"I am very pleased to have this opportunity to finally meet you." The man sounded friendly enough. "I hope my guards were not too rough in bringing you here. They tend to be a bit overenthusiastic at times."

"It's fine," he muttered. "Could you please tell me why I'm here?"

"Of course, of course, I brought you here so I could help you with your problem."

Naruto grunted. "Which problem? I have a few."

"I am referring to that seal on your chest that you are so desperate to get rid of. The one Jiraiya placed on you."

Naruto stared at him. "How do you know about that?! The only people who were supposed to know were me, Jiraiya, and the Hokage."

The headmaster smiled serenely. "Oh I have my ways. I know a great many things that happen here. For instance I sensed when you were first able to use the Kyuubi's demonic aura. I sent a report to your Hokage and arranged for Jiraiya to be brought here to meet with you."

"So you were the one! You informed the Hokage. Why?"

The headmaster shrugged. "Simple courtesy. The Hokage asked me to keep an eye on you and inform him if you accessed the Kyuubi's power. I promised I would. A man should always keep his promises don't you think?"

"Yeah," Naruto answered dryly. "So you arranged for Jiraiya to come here knowing what he was going to do to me?"

"No, I was not told of his purpose. I learned of it on my own. Please understand, I do not owe your Hokage any special loyalty. While he did enroll you at this academy I like to think my first loyalty is to my students."

"Does this mean you can actually help me?" Naruto tried not to get his hopes up.

"Certainly, I am a seal master of some skill. I could not undo the seal; however I would be able to render it inert and harmless."

"That would be great!"

"However," the Headmaster grinned. "Doing so would certainly displease your Hokage and possibly cause future difficulties. Therefore before I help you I would ask for a little favor in return."

Why am I not surprised? "What sort of favor?" Naruto asked warily.

"What do you know of ANTI-THESIS?"

"Never heard of it, what is it?"

"It is an organization made up of outcast ayashi who have a hatred against all pure bred monsters. They have been a nuisance up to now, but seem to be growing bolder. You have already faced them as Saizou, Midou, and their allies were all members. They seem to be moving towards some sort of ultimate goal, I even believe that they may have a member on the Academy School Committee. I need to know who their leaders are and what they are up to."

"And you want me to take care of this for you?"

"That's right, and since you happen to be a member of the Student Police Committee you may also enlist their aid as well."

"But can't you just order them to help? I mean you're the headmaster."

"I am afraid the committee and I have had some disagreements on certain matters. Oh I could task them with this. Kuyou would certainly not refuse my request. However he might be a bit less than enthusiastic in pursuing the matter. Whereas you have excellent motivation."

"So once again I just get used."

"Hardly that, no one is being used. Think of this as a mere exchange of favors. You give me something I want and in return I will give you something that you want. Now doesn't that seem fair?"

What it seems like is a hell of a lot of trouble. But if it takes care of the seal on my chest I don't have much of a choice. "Yeah, I guess it's fair. All right, I'll handle it for you."

Three Days Later

He and Kuyou descended a small stairwell into the lower levels of the Committee's headquarters.

"We were only able to track down one of your attackers Uzumaki-san." Kuyou sounded slightly annoyed. "The scum seem to have scattered. This one was stupid enough to actually stay at the academy."

Exiting the stairwell was a long dimly lit corridor lined with locked cells. As they walked down the corridor Naruto noticed that about a dozen of the cells were occupied by students. A couple cried out pleading their innocence, the rest hid in the shadows of their cells as he and Kuyou walked past.

"Who are these people?" Naruto asked.

"They are criminals we are investigating. We hold them here for awhile to punish them for their crimes. Most of them will be released after awhile."

"Most of them? What about the rest?"

Kuyou looked over at him. "The ones that aren't released are dealt with."

"And just how exactly do you deal with them?"

Kuyou smiled. "I mean just what you think I mean. We are after all the enforcers of the rules and guardians of the peace here. Certain sacrifices are necessary."

Naruto had no qualms about killing an enemy. In that respect he was no different than almost all other ninja. He also understood that interrogation and torture were a reality of both the ninja and monster worlds. But he had doubts about killing helpless prisoners.

"The prisoner's name is Moroha." Kuyou pulled out a large iron key as they came to the very last cell at the far end of the corridor. With a hollow, 'thunk' the iron door swung open.

Naruto immediately recognized the prisoner as one that had helped Saizou attack him that second time. He was in chains and stripped naked on the far wall, otherwise he seemed all right. His spirit had certainly not been broken.

"Let me out of here you bastards! You have no right to do this!"

"We have every right you disgusting half breed. We are the Student Police Committee."

"You're nothing but a bunch of elitist bastards who get off on making everyone else afraid of you."

"I would enjoy teaching you some respect you piece of trash. But I will instead leave that to my student. Uzumaki-san., I leave the interrogation to you."

"What? I thought I was just going to watch!"

Kuyou shook his head. "Think of this as valuable training, you can use your fire abilities against a live opponent. You can see what you can do and also work on fine tuning your control. Of course should you make a mistake," he looked at Moroha meaningfully. "No one will care."

"I'll fight someone if I have to, but I'm not going to torture anyone."

"I see," Kuyou said. "I thought the information was vital, but perhaps I was wrong. If you do not wish him to be tortured then he will not be. But if you do not interrogate him no one else will. He may hold the information you need. Will you allow it to remain hidden there, just out of reach? Or will you do what is necessary even if you find it distasteful?"

Naruto looked at Moroha and then looked back at Kuyou. "You really are a bastard you know." He held out his right palm and filled it with fire. "But I guess I'm one too." He muttered.

"Not so much," Kuyou counseled. "You don't want to kill him; you want to be able to keep this up for days or weeks if you need to. Try just one finger."

Naruto concentrated and caused most of the fire to disappear. There was only fire on the tip of his index finger. As he approached the prisoner he saw the way all his attention was focused on that small bit of flame. "It would be best if you just told me what I need to know now."

"Fuck you," Moroha said defiantly.

Naruto nodded. "I am sorry about this; I know what it's like to burn. But you're my enemy and I need that information." He pressed his finger into the man's chest and listened as the skin and muscle began to cook and the smell of meat filled the cell. Moroha managed to bite down on his screams. Naruto admired that, but he also knew it was pointless. He understood what it felt like to burn. He was sure Moroha would be screaming very soon.

The Present

"I think that's enough for today," Kuyou said. Thus bringing the interrogation session to an end.

Naruto nodded and put the fire out.

"You did very well," Kuyou commented. "You're starting to get quite good at this."

He suspected that was true, but it was not a compliment he wanted. "If I'm done I'll be going."

"I'll see you tomorrow at the same time Uzumaki-san."

Naruto grunted a reply as he performed the shun shin and disappeared in a swirl of wind and leaves.

After a hot shower and change of clothes he body flickered to his girlfriend's apartment. The smell of burnt food told him immediately she had tried to make ramen again. *Honestly, how do you burn ramen? It's the easiest thing in the world to make.* But he really didn't mind. He was almost starting to find the smell of burnt ramen comforting. He associated it with Moka.

After a quick meal they'd gone over to her couch for a nice relaxed make out session before taking things to the bedroom.

"Are you sure you don't want to go anywhere for winter break Naruto-kun? Once you remove my rosary I can take us anywhere you want."

He thought about it. "Well maybe we can do something for the last week of vacation. But right now I have to keep working on this investigation. Do you mind Moka-chan? If you really want to go somewhere..."

"Will you spend every night with me in my bed?"

"Definitely."

"Then I don't mind."

Laughing he got up from the couch and picked her up bridal style.
"Have I mentioned that I love you?"

"Not in the last ten minutes."

Feeling really happy he carried into the bedroom. He loved her and he wanted a life with her where they could both really be free and safe. To make that future happen he was ready to do anything.

A vacation

" **Spitfire Technique** ." Out of his mouth came a small stream of concentrated fire. It struck a tree about twenty yards away dead center. The flames caught and it was quickly burning. He ran through some more hand signs. " **Great Gale Technique** ." A powerful wind buffeted the tree and the surrounding area blowing out the flames. As soon as that happened he ended the jutsu.

"That was great Naruto-kun!" Moka said. It was late morning. With classes out they had been spending most of the mornings training and working out together. She glanced at his face and was surprised to see he wasn't smiling. "Is something wrong?"

"Not really," he sighed. "It's just that I can't rally cut loose here. Since I've started using the Kyuubi's power to make fire I've found fire jutsu come as naturally to me and wind ones. I've learned a bunch of really powerful wind and fire based attacks. I'd love to really see what I could do with them, but I don't dare."

"Are you worried you'll destroy the whole forest?" She joked.

"Yes," he answered completely seriously. "And I don't think the people at the academy would appreciate it. The last thing I need right now is to get expelled." He found himself recalling the famous training grounds of his old village. There ninja could use their full strength without concern. The village had a corps of maintenance ninja who specialized in repairing the damage. You could flatten a training ground and within a few days it would be restored. But there was nothing like that here.

"Well if you really want I can take you somewhere that you could do that."

He nodded at her. "I've actually been thinking about that." He glanced at his watch. "I have to go meet Kuyou now. I'll come by for

dinner at the usual time."

She smiled. "I'll make some more ramen for you."

"Heh, great," *I should never have told her ramen was my favorite food* . "I'll see you later Moka-chan." He disappeared in a swirl of wind and leaves.

"I am afraid I have come to the conclusion that the prisoner has no more information to give us." Kuyou said.

"It really took you this long to figure that out?"

Kuyou sent him an annoyed glance. "That being the case, I want you to deal with him."

"Deal with him?"

"Kill him, is that plain enough?"

"I'm not going to do it."

"Please just let me go," Moroha pleaded feebly. "I promise I won't tell anyone anything."

They both ignored him.

"Think of it as training. You need to be able to do terrible things whenever necessary."

Naruto gave the kitsune a cold look. "Don't assume I'll have any trouble with that when the time comes. But he's not the one I hate. I'm not going to kill a prisoner just because you want me to."

Kuyou shook his head disappointed. "You're weak Uzumaki-san."

"And killing a helpless prisoner will somehow make me strong?"

"Doing what must be done without hesitation will make you strong."

"Obviously you and I have different ideas about what's necessary. Tell me something, since this has turned out to be a dead end where does the investigation stand?"

Kuyou frowned at him. "At the moment we have no leads, there is no one for us to investigate. When school begins again we will try and find some more of these scum."

"All right, in that case I think I'll take a vacation for the rest of winter break. I'll see you again when the semester starts."

"What about your training?" Kuyou demanded.

"Don't worry, I'll make sure to jab myself with a stick every day."

"How is it?" Moka asked.

Horrible! Terrible! Barely edible! He chewed what was in his mouth and swallowed it. "Great! I really love the way you make ramen!"

"I'm so glad you like it Naruto-kun," Moka said. "To be honest I don't care for it myself, I guess ramen must be an acquired taste. So I don't think I'll eat it anymore, but I'll be happy to make it just for you any time you want!"

"Great," inside he was weeping. *Note to self, lying to Moka only leads to bad things!* "Listen Moka-chan, we have ten days until classes start. I was wondering if we could go and do something together."

"Sure Naruto-kun! What did you have in mind?"

"Well, there's something I've wanted to do for a really long time now. I want..." As she listened Naruto saw the look of excitement on her face fade away. "If this is something you don't want to do Moka-chan

we don't have to. We can do something else; so long as we're together I'll be happy."

"It's not that Naruto-kun," she sighed. "If this is what you want to do it's fine. It's just that it would probably be best if my other side was with you."

"That would probably be safest." He agreed.

She let out another heart felt sigh. "It's fair I suppose. She loves you too. I just would have liked it if I could have been the one you spent your vacation with."

It was one of the many odd aspects of being with someone with two personalities. Even though he was wanting to spend time with her, because he would be with the adult Moka it almost felt as if her were abandoning her. He reached across the table and took a hold of her hand. "I'll tell you what Moka-chan, next break you can choose where we go."

She smiled a bit, that seemed to satisfy her. "All right."

The following day two strangers entered the town of Jiboujiki. Jiboujiki was a small town in the middle of a hot empty plain on the western fringes of Earth country. The permanent population was perhaps 5,000 no more than that. The buildings were all simple stone structures. Many of them looked to be in need of repair. There was no outer wall or gate so the two of them simply walked into town. All along the streets there were bars and gambling dens. Most of the men they spotted were armed and looking them over. They were a mix of unemployed samurai, mercenaries, bandits, and a handful of rogue ninja. As they walked along a dirt street every eye turned to them.

Naruto knew they were not looking at him. He was dressed in all black with a mask and hood completely covering his face and head except for his eyes. He had weapons and ninja gear openly

displayed. He did not have a hitai-ite though. His choice of dress screamed, 'ninja' but given the surroundings he did not really stand out. They were staring because of Moka. With her long flowing silver hair, slitted red eyes, and fangs she could not help but draw attention. Her choice of dress, a tight fitting white blouse, red mini skirt, and heels only made her even more eye catching. It was hardly surprising when a group of six heavily armed men started approaching them. Every last one of them had a sword belted on and moved with the swagger of men used to getting what they wanted.

Seeing them Moka grinned slightly. "Why not leave these fools to me while you take care of what we came here for?"

He glanced over at her. "You sure?"

"Quite sure."

He could tell none of them could mold chakra. They were ordinary samurai or bandits. He felt a little sorry for them. "Fine, I'll meet you back here when I'm done." He continued on his way as she veered off towards the approaching men.

There was only one two story building in the entire town and it was located near the center of it. Over the doorway was a weather beaten sign that read, 'Freebooters Guild.' He walked in. He was rather surprised to find what looked like just another large bar. There were armed men sitting at various tables drinking and playing cards. It looked nothing like what he had expected. Despite the sign out front he wondered if he had somehow come to the wrong place.

"Can I help you?"

Naruto turned around to see a short balding man with glasses. "I'm not sure; I came here to get a mission."

The man nodded. "You've come to the right place then. My name is Yuu and I am the executive secretary of the Freebooters Guild."

"You are?" He couldn't keep the disappointment out of his voice. When he'd first heard of this place he'd imagined it to be filled with desperate and powerful missing nins. To find someone who looked like a shop keeper in the middle of a bar... it wasn't what he'd had in mind.

The man seemed to understand and just nodded. "I don't take any of the missions myself of course. I simply help to run the guild. Our rules are very simple; you first need to join the guild. There is a one thousand ryu fee and you must fill out a form. The membership is good for one year. Then you can pick any mission that's on the board." He nodded to the far wall. The wall was covered with perhaps a hundred slips of paper. "We get all sorts of requests at all sorts of pay rates. Now obviously the rates are much lower than what a ninja village would expect. The whole reason we exist after all is to provide an option for those who can't afford to hire regular ninja. 'Bloody deeds done dirt cheap!' That's our motto."

"I see," Naruto replied. "And these are real ninja missions?"

"They're real missions with real clients." Yuu replied. "They aren't usually performed by ninja though. As of right now we have ten ninja in the guild. Most of our members are samurai." Yuu eyed him carefully. "Are you a ninja?"

"Yeah."

"Well that's fine then, we won't ask about your circumstances or what village you are originally from. And just so you know, whatever you put down on the application is just for our records. No one is going to be worried about accuracy. So do you want to join?"

Naruto nodded. "Yeah I do." He pulled out gamachan; his frog wallet was stuffed almost to overflowing with ryu notes. Just about the only good thing he would say about his village was that the monthly

stipend he received was pretty generous. Since he wasn't very materialistic he had saved up an awful lot. He paid the fee and quickly filled out the form.

Yuu took it from him and looked it over. "Well Minato, it's good to have you aboard. Pick out whatever mission you want from the board and then bring it up to me so I can assign it to you officially."

Beneath the mask Naruto was smiling. He thought it only right that he got to use his father's name for once.

Naruto was carefully looking over the missions that had been tacked up in the wall. Most of them were about what he had expected. Requests for body guards, retrieval missions, assassinations, and a few requests for kidnappings. He took his time looking them over, this was a one time thing and he wanted to choose carefully. That was when he noted a small yellowed card a bit lower than the others. He looked at that one. When he read the request he smiled. *Perfect* ! He snatched it off the wall and brought it back to Yuu.

When Yuu read the card he looked at Naruto. "Are you sure this is the one you want? This mission has been sitting up there for at least five years. The only reason it was even still up there was because it didn't seem worth the effort of throwing out. You're certain this is the mission you want?"

"It's exactly what I want!"

Yuu shrugged and wrote something down on a clipboard. "It's yours then, good luck, you'll need it."

Heading down the same street he'd come up he soon spotted six bloodied and beaten men lying in the dirt. Moka was standing there looking bored. Surprisingly there was no one else in sight. All the men that had been hanging out of the bars looking her over had strangely disappeared.

"You have fun?" He asked her.

She looked contemptuous. "Bah, they were too weak to even provide a decent workout. Have you gotten what we came here for?"

"I sure did." He handed her the card.

She read it with a frown. "I do not understand. We came here because you said you wanted to go on an actual ninja mission. Was this the only one available?"

"No," he took the card back from her. "They had all sorts of missions including some high paying requests for assassinations."

"But instead you took a request to retrieve a locket? A request that is only paying 2,000 ryu. Unless I am completely mistaken that is a very small amount of money isn't it?"

"It's not much," Naruto agreed. The two of them were already on the way out of town. "But this isn't about the money."

"Is it about the challenge then?" Moka asked. "Because if it is I would think a mission going against other ninja would be more challenging."

"It's not really about that either, though I will enjoy getting to use my jutsus at full power for a change."

"Then if it is not about the money or the challenge what is it about?"

From beneath his mask he smiled at her. "It's a chance to do what I always wanted to."

"I do not understand you at all." Moka admitted. Still she reached out and put her arm through his as they left Jiboujiki.

Sugawa was a bandit leader with a hundred men under him. He made a good living traveling the roadways along the far edges of

Earth, Wind, and other smaller countries. He made a point of never staying in one location for too long and regularly crossing borders. By doing this he avoided being seen as too big a problem for any particular country. So long as he and his men remained just nuisances no one was going to pay to send ninja after them. Given the size of his band local militias and police forces were no threat at all. He'd been following this simple strategy for seven years and had profited from it.

He had no idea his brilliant career was about to come to a bloody end.

The first inkling he got was when a couple of his sentries let out some shouts that were quickly cut off. He and all his men pulled out their weapons and readied themselves within their camp. They were rather surprised to see two individuals come tramping out of the woods straight towards them, making no effort to hide themselves. One of them definitely looked like a ninja; the other was a woman with red eyes who seemed to radiate some sort of lethal power. He naturally eyed the surrounding woods, wondering if these two were really alone.

"What is it you want?" Sugawa called out.

The ninja answered him. "A locket, it's silver and made in a heart shape with the picture of a baby boy inside. You and your men stole it from its rightful owner six years ago in a little village called Akido."

Sugawa gaped at him. "Are you serious? Do you think I keep track of every trinket I've ever taken?"

"It's not a trinket to the woman who owned it." Naruto spoke coldly. The sound of his voice and the feel of his mounting killer intent made a few of the bandits begin to look at each other nervously. "To her it's the only picture she has of a child she lost long ago. To her it is a treasure beyond all price. I am going to find that locket and deliver it to her. The only question is whether or not I kill all of you first."

Sugawa eyed them both carefully. "Even if you are both ninja I have over a hundred well armed men. The odds would be stacked against you."

"You mistake me fool," Moka said proudly. "I am a vampire."

"And I am no ordinary ninja; I have a demon inside me."

Sugawa grinned. "What kind of fool do you take me for? The woman may well have some sort of weird blood line, but there's no such thing as vampires. And demons are nothing but stories."

"I take it you're ignorant about the Kyuubi and the other Bijū?"

"What?"

"Never mind," Naruto began flipping through hand signs. "It would be a waste to explain to someone I'm about to kill anyway. **Great Gale Technique** ." Hurricane force winds struck the men in front of him and scattered them about like leaves in a storm. He quickly cast a second jutsu. " **Fire Style: Immortal Phoenix Technique** ." Above his head a large bird made of solid flame was born. It flew swiftly straight at the targets he picked. Just one touch of a wing or claw was enough to light the men up like torches. Each man that was set on fire screamed like hell, but only for a little while. Even while he was the one doing it to them he felt a little sympathy. He understood what they felt as they died.

Moka had raced straight in eager to fight. As the bandits staggered to their feet after being blown down they found themselves facing her. They were no match. "Against the speed and power of a vampire you are nothing!" She slammed her fist into another of them and sent him down with a broken jaw. "Know your place!"

Naruto could have created a few hundred shadow clones or unleashed the Kyuubi's power and ended things quickly. But that wasn't what he wanted. He wanted to fight like a ninja would. As

soon as he ended his fire jutsu he took out some kunai and raced into the ruined camp. As the bandits tried to come at him he threw his kunai at them. Surrounding each one with wind based chakra they went into and threw their bodies. He saw their blood gush out of their ruined chests as they fell fatally wounded or dead. The sight of the blood was different from killing with fire. He felt no sympathy. What he felt instead was pleasure. These men were nothing but prey to him, nothing but plump rabbits born for slaughter. Too quick most of them were gone, the few remaining were running from him in terror. The thought of letting them go never even crossed his mind.

"Please no!" The great and feared Sugawa begged.

Naruto slammed his kunai into the side of his throat. A wild smile was hidden beneath his mask as he watched the blood splurt onto his face and clothing. Seeing the fear in the man's eyes as he died gave Naruto nothing but pleasure.

"Any survivors?" Naruto asked cheerfully.

"Only the dozen or so I fought." Moka said. "I noticed you did not leave any."

He nodded. "Well I'll go ahead and take care of them."

"You are going to kill them?" She sounded surprised.

"That's right; they're too dangerous to allow to live. If I let them go they'll talk about fighting a ninja and a vampire. If that gets out it could be traced back to us, I can't risk it."

"I see." Moka said. She made no further comment as Naruto went about cutting throats.

It took most of the day and the help of a hundred shadow clones to go through the treasure wagons. But finally one of his clones came

up with a silver locket that matched the description perfectly.

"We're done, we can go now." He pocketed the locket and dismissed the clones. Along with the locket he had filled a sack with stacks of ryo notes as well as some precious stones. Moka had a fondness for gold and helped herself to a vast number of gold bracelets and other pieces.

Seeing him with his sack Moka grinned. "I thought this was not about the money?"

"It isn't," Naruto replied. "But I don't believe in looking a gift horse in the mouth."

"Now we go to Akido and return the locket to its rightful owner!"

Akido was a small mountainside village located in a sparsely populated region of earth country. The people there received few outsiders and the sudden appearance of Naruto and Moka caused quite a stir. Naruto quickly explained why they were there and the residents told them where he could find the locket's owner.

He stood before a tombstone with the same name as on the yellowed card. The woman who had put in the request to have her precious locket returned to her had died over a year ago. He took out the locket and simply let it slip through his fingers.

"So it was useless," he said bitterly. "It was useless from the start."

Moka moved to stand beside him. "I do not understand," she spoke quietly. "Naruto, why does the death of a woman you never even met bother you?"

He stared down at the plain tombstone. "I was trying to be a hero."

"You wanted to be a hero?" Moka repeated. "Is that what all of this was about?"

He kept his eyes down. He felt too ashamed and stupid to look her in the eye. "When I was just a little kid, I was like everyone else and thought ninja were the coolest. They were seen as the brave protectors of the village. They were looked up to and admired. They were heroes. I used to imagine becoming a ninja and going on heroic missions to help people who needed it. Of course since then I've gotten some bitter lessons in the reality of ninja life."

He paused to take a deep breath.

"I don't know what I'm going to become, but it certainly isn't a hero. I have so much hate and rage inside me... I'm overflowing with hate. And I'm starting to become someone very cruel. The other day, when I killed those men I knew they had no chance against me. I knew it and it excited me. 'I can slaughter them and they can't even touch me,' I thought. I tortured some one and even though I complained about it I still did it willingly. I'm trying to gain the Kyuubi's power, and the more I do the more I can feel myself changing."

He looked up at her now. "There has always been darkness inside of me Moka-chan, places in my heart that I tried not to look at. But ever since I began using the Kyuubi's power the darkness in me has been getting stronger. And what worries me the most? It doesn't bother me any more to look into the dark. I'm getting used to it, and I'm starting to wonder what I'll become."

"I see," Moka said calmly.

"So before I changed too much I wanted to see, just once, what it was like to be a hero. I wanted to help someone just because they needed it. I don't know, I guess I thought if I could just see what it felt like it might help. But I should have known it wouldn't work. I'm not meant to be a hero I suppose."

Moka let out a depressed sigh. "You are a fool Uzumaki Naruto."

He lowered his head again feeling defeated. "I know."

She turned to him and carefully pulled down his mask so she could see his face. " **Not** because you wish to be a hero, but because you do not realize that you already are one."

"What do you mean?"

"The very first day that you met my other self you were ready to risk your life to protect her, even though you had only just met. You went out of your way to befriend and accept Yukari even though her actions had only caused you grief. When the other Moka was captured you deliberately walked into a trap to rescue her. And in order to save my life you chose to turn to that very darkness that you so fear." Her hand soothingly touched his cheek. "You do not need to go on a mission to be a hero, you already are one."

He looked at her. "For you and the precious people I care about I would do anything. But there's no denying there's darkness in me."

She nodded. "Do not deny it, accept it and make it a part of you. That is your only choice, other wise, if you try and deny it, it really may swallow you whole. I have darkness within me as well. I can hate and be cruel when I must. For instance, I would gladly kill anyone who threatens you or who is your enemy. Even the gentle Moka can hate when there is cause. Do the things you must to protect those you love."

He slowly nodded. The way she said it actually gave him some hope. "Thank you Moka-chan. Listen, we have five days of vacation still left. Do you want to head back to the academy?"

The adult Moka smiled. "I have a better idea."

Five Days Later

Naruto had the teen Moka wrapped tight in his arms. It was cold and windy but they didn't mind. They were standing back to front on top of the highest observation level of the Eiffel Tower looking down at Paris at night.

"I can see why they call it the City of Light." Naruto said.

She leaned back against him and let out a contented sigh. "I can't believe we have to go back tonight."

"Well I still can't believe that the other Moka suggested I spend the rest of our break with you."

The younger Moka looked up at him and smiled. "We are the same person Naruto-kun; she feels my joy just as I feel hers. She also thought it was best if you were with me for awhile."

"Some times I need a hard hand and some times I need a gentle one?"

"Something like that." She twisted about in his arms so that she was facing him rather than the skyline. "You are a good man Naruto-kun, and I love you very much. Never doubt that even if you do things you are not proud of, I will still love you."

He kissed her. "Thank you Moka-chan, as long as I have your love I think I can face anything."

That kind of guy

The first day of the spring semester. Naruto exited the boys' dorm as part of a steady stream of male students. Looking out there was a small crowd of boys gathered. Without seeing her he already knew Moka was in the middle of them. Since becoming an official couple he'd hoped the other boys would back off and be more respectful of Moka's choice. No such luck. The majority of them went right on worshipping her from a far. His only consolation was in knowing none of them were any threat to him and the love he shared with her.

After all, he'd woken up this morning in her bed. They'd already spent an hour together working out and training. At some point today she would tell him how good he smelled and drink his blood. And tonight, after class, after martial arts club, after dinner and some studying, he would be in her bed again making love to her.

He smiled. No, these boys who kept telling her how much they loved her, they were no threat at all.

"Naruto-kun!" The sudden shout brought him out of his thoughts just in time to see two gigantic hills coming straight at him. His face was shoved into a yellow sweater and he found himself being smothered. "I've missed you darling! Yahoo! I am so happy to see you again! Did you miss me?"

He managed to pull out of Kurumu's grasp and breathe again. "Ah, it's really good to see you again, Kurumu-chan."

"Naruto-kun!" Having just shaken Kurumu loose he found an eleven year old glomped onto his chest. "I've missed you!"

He smiled at her as he carefully loosened her grip. "Hey Yukari-chan, it's good to see you again. How are your parents?"

"They're both fine," Yukari said. "I wish I could spend more time with them."

"Hello Kurumu-chan, Yukari-chan, it's so good you both." Moka put both arms around Naruto's and stood very close to him. She and Kurumu seemed to be having an impromptu staring match.

"Oh Naruto-kun," Kurumu chirped cheerfully. "I made you a little something I hope you'll enjoy."

"Cookies?" He asked eagerly. As much as he loved Moka there was no denying who had the better cooking skills.

"Oh, you'll like this *much* better." She took out what looked like a photo album and gave it to him. "I made this for you over the break."

"Well that's nice. I appreciate," he opened it and took a look at the first page. "Whoa!"

Moka also got a good look. "Nani!" She immediately snatched the book out of his hands and slammed it shut. "What is this?!" She shouted at Kurumu.

"What?" Kurumu said innocently. "They're just some artistic pictures of me I thought Naruto-kun might enjoy."

"Those pictures are of you in leather bra and panties holding a whip!"

Kurumu grinned. "Like I said, artistic. You should see the ones of me with my maid's outfit."

Moka shoved the book back at her. "Naruto-kun does not want to look at any of your pictures!"

"Oh really? I haven't heard Naruto say anything." She smiled at him demurely. "What do you think darling?"

Moka turned to look at him as well. He could see the vein throbbing in her forehead. "Yes Naruto-kun, what do you think?"

Naruto had a sudden image of adult Moka glaring at him and a shiver ran through his spine. "Uh, while I really appreciate the thought I don't think that would be an appropriate gift. So I'm afraid I can't accept."

Moka happily grabbed onto his arm and stuck her tongue out at her blue haired rival.

Naruto sighed. It was the start of a new day and new semester.

Completely unobserved through all of this was a purple haired girl standing behind a near by tree. Mizore watched the scene play out and then watched as the four of them headed towards the academy. She began to follow them, staying out of sight the whole way. A part of her realized just how pathetic she was being to get so hung up on a guy just because he had been nice to her a couple times. Even if he was really cute, even if he was kind, even if he did give her a warm feeling whenever he looked at her, it was pointless. He had a girlfriend. And not just any girlfriend, he was dating the hottest girl in their class. And if that wasn't bad enough the second hottest girl was also interested in him. She knew she had nothing to offer him that could even begin to compete against them. The sensible part of her told her to just give it up and go back to being alone.

But most of her was very happy just to be near him.

"Class," Nekonome-sensei called them to order. "There is someone I would like you to meet. He is the president of the newspaper club, of which I am the faculty advisor."

The door to the class opened and in strolled a tall good looking guy with thick dark hair. In his hands he had a bouquet of red roses. With the exceptions of Moka, Kurumu and Mizore all the girls in class let out a warm greeting and began to smile at the newcomer.

"Class this is Morioka Gin," Nekonome announced.

The boy turned and nodded to the teacher. "Thank you for that warm greeting sensei." He turned back to the class with a dazzling smile. "I hope all of you enjoy reading the school paper, and I hope I can count on you to get a copy each and every Monday. However I'm actually here on business." He seemed to glide across the floor to the seat next to Naruto's. "These are for you lovely lady."

Moka was very surprised to have the bouquet placed in front of her. "Oh! Why thank you." She took the flowers. "They're lovely."

Naruto sent the man a flat look and had to keep himself from growling. Standing at a distance and calling out affections was one thing. Actually giving someone's girlfriend flowers was something else entirely.

"They are almost as lovely as you are. You know you have become quite the celebrity here on campus Akashiya Moka. Our readers are very interested in you and I wonder if you wouldn't mind giving me an interview today during lunch?"

"Well actually I usually have lunch with my friends."

He gave her a charming smile. "I'm sure they wouldn't mind you missing just one lunch."

"It would mean a great deal to me and to the newspaper club." Nekonome-sensei put in pleadingly.

"Weeeeell I suppose one lunch wouldn't be too big a deal." She looked over at Naruto. "You don't mind do you Naruto-kun?"

Hell yes I mind! With sensei and the whole class looking at him he plastered on a fake smile. "Of course not."

"Wonderful!" Gin smoothly took one of her hands and planted a small kiss on it before she could object. "I look forward to it. Please just come down to the newspaper room at the start of lunch."

"Well this is a rare pleasure." Kurumu said brightly. "I actually get to sit next to you during lunch time."

"Don't get used to it," Yukari chided. "Moka-chan will be back in her usual spot tomorrow."

"Hmmm, maybe, maybe not, we'll see."

Naruto looked up from his barely touched food. "What do you mean?"

Kurumu smiled at him. "Oh nothing, it's just that Gin is definitely that kind of guy."

"What kind?" Yukari asked.

"A player," she said. "He's the kind of guy who knows just what to tell a girl to get into her heart, or at least into her pants. From what I hear he's very smooth. And it's pretty obvious that he has his sights set on Moka."

"It doesn't matter how smooth he is." Naruto sounded annoyed. "Moka-chan would never be interested in a guy like that."

"Oh I don't know," Kurumu said playfully. "He's pretty good looking and you shouldn't underestimate the effect of a good looking guy paying a girl a lot of attention. Like I said, he knows what a girl likes to hear, and Moka is kind of innocent."

"Moka and I love each other." He said with complete certainty.

"Hey, it wouldn't be the first time a girl with a boyfriend got seduced."

"Seduced?" Naruto tried to laugh it off. "No way would that ever happen."

"You're probably right," Kurumu grinned. "Then again you're the first boyfriend she's ever had right? So she doesn't really have a lot of experience dealing with characters like him. That Gin is a real wolf,

and poor little Moka is just a babe in the woods. Who knows what could happen?" She leaned against him and made sure to press her boobs against his arm. "But don't worry darling, if anything happens I'll be there to comfort you."

"Hey you." A girl's voice called out.

The three of them all turned to look at the source of the voice. Mizore's head was popping up over some near by shrubs. "Stop teasing Naruto, I think he's taking you seriously."

Kurumu frowned at the girl that had interrupted her. "He should take me seriously. I know the type and that Gin will definitely try and put some moves on Moka."

"It doesn't matter," Mizore said calmly. "No girl who was lucky enough to be with someone like Naruto would ever be interested in anyone else." She looked away. "I know I wouldn't." She mumbled too quietly for them to hear.

"Mizore-chan," Naruto said. "What are you doing over there?"

"Having lunch."

He shook his head. "Why don't you come sit with us?"

"No thanks, I'm fine right here." She ducked back down and disappeared from sight.

Even though he knew Kurumu had just been teasing him he was still a little relieved when he spotted her on the way to sixth period class. When he saw who was walking next to her his relief disappeared. As soon as Moka spotted him she waved and brought Gin over with her. He noted that she had a hold of him arm.

"Hey Naruto-kun, I was just telling Gin-sempai all about you." She turned to Gin. "This is Naruto-kun, my boyfriend."

"Of course, I remember him from your class. You've developed quite a reputation at this school too you know." His smile turned a bit frosty. "You'll have to tell me sometime how a human managed to get onto the Student Police Committee. Tell me how do you get along with Kuyou?"

"Not real well, he's a lousy sensei and has a habit of wasting my time instead of teaching me anything useful."

Gin's eyebrows leapt. "He's actually *teaching* you? I never thought that would ever happen. Well Naruto you certainly are a *lucky* fellow. Not only do you have the head of the Student Police Committee on your side but you have an amazing girl like Moka too. How did you ever get so lucky?"

"Clean living," he took a hold of Moka's hand. "Come on Moka-chan lets get to class."

She nodded and then turned back to Gin. "I'll see you after I'm done with class."

He smiled warmly at her. "I'm looking forward to it Moka-chan."

Moka-chan? Naruto looked over at her as soon as they were out of ear shot. "What was that about?"

"Oh, Gin-sempai wants to continue the interview so he asked me if I could meet with him after class."

"What about martial arts club?"

"Naruto-kun we've skipped sessions before, I'm sure Kenpachi-sempai will be all right if I miss one more."

"Do you really have to go?" He pleaded. "I mean you already spent a whole hour with him. How many more questions can he ask you?"

"Oh I've spent more than an hour with him. When my lunch time was up Gin-sempai was nice enough to walk with me to my next class."

And was waiting afterwards to walk me again. He's really a very nice and intelligent fellow; I think he will make a really good friend."

"Really?" Naruto said cautiously. "So you're going to keep seeing him after today?"

"Well of course," she smiled happily. "That is what friends do after all." As they walked she leaned in and sniffed at his neck. "You know I didn't get to have lunch, and you smell soooo good."

He let go of her hand and pulled away from her. "Come on, we're going to be late for class."

His reaction caught her off guard. "Naruto-kun?"

He said nothing as he hurried towards class.

It was more than two hours after the end of class when the two of them finally left the academy. Being a gentleman Gin had of course insisted on walking Moka back to her dorm. As they walked he kept her engaged and smiling with short stories about his many odd adventures. As they went he carefully put a comforting hand on her shoulder. Nothing too blatant, nothing overt, he knew that if he wanted her the slow and gentle seduction was what was called for.

And he wanted her very badly.

From an academy roof top a figure watched them go. Watched as Gin placed his hand on her. Watched as she smiled and walked close to him. Watched as Gin tried to steal his girlfriend's affection. He felt the urge to just unleash it. To let all that dark power come out and literally tear the son of a bitch apart.

He didn't.

"I won't, I won't, I won't," he muttered to himself. He could feel a murderous rage filling him, but he held himself in check. He controlled his anger.

For now.

Just for tonight

As they neared the girls' dorm Gin decided to run his gambit. "You know Moka-chan you really are quite an amazing girl. I mean aside from your obvious beauty you're also very intelligent and have a very interesting viewpoint on things."

Moka smiled and blushed at his compliment. "Arigato, Gin-sempai."

He suddenly stopped and took a hold of both of her hands. "Moka-chan," he looked down into her innocent green eyes with sudden soul searing passion. "Please I beg of you, join the newspaper club! I need someone with your energy and quick wit. I know you would be a huge asset to our club and would have a lot of fun as well! Please Moka-chan! Join the newspaper club so that we can work together side by side like true friends should!"

"Nani?!" His sudden request caught her completely and totally by surprise. "But, but, I'm already in the martial arts club."

"That is not a problem; students can be in multiple clubs."

"Ah, I don't think Kenpachi-sempai would allow it. He's very strict on attendance and I have already missed a number of sessions. He would definitely not be all right with me splitting time between two clubs."

"I see," Gin said sadly. "Do you really enjoy the martial arts club then? I would never try and take you away from something that brought you joy."

"Well..." she had memories of running multiple laps around the school and of constantly being thrown to the mat by Kenpachi. "I don't really enjoy it, but I get to spend time with Naruto-kun while I'm there."

"Really? Is that the reason you joined? To spend time with him? But from what you tell me you have two classes with him as well as home room. You also work out in the mornings with him. You take vacations with him. You even study with him at night. (Note: Moka has not mentioned anything about her sex life or where Naruto normally spends his nights.) It seems you spend a great deal of time with him. Would not being in the same club really be so bad?"

She hesitated. "Well, when you put it like that maybe, but..."

He gave her a reassuring smile and squeezed her hands a bit. "Come on, I'm sure that if Naruto is as thoughtful and caring as you say he'd want you in a club you'd enjoy. Doesn't interviewing people and writing reports sound more interesting than doing exercise?"

"It does sound intriguing," she admitted.

"Then you'll do it?" He looked at her with hopeful eyes.

She thought about it. It really did sound like it might be fun. She slowly nodded. "Yes, I'll do it."

She entered her apartment and kicked off her shoes. "Naruto-kun? Are you here?" When she got no answer she glanced at her clock. Because of Gin she was back later than usual. Normally Naruto would already be here studying. Well, he was probably running late too. She decided to get dinner started since he would probably be dropping by any minute.

As she began to cook her stomach rumbled, reminding her that she hadn't eaten all day. That thought reminded her of the way Naruto had refused to let her have some of his blood. Not only had he refused to do that he had largely ignored her in class and not even asked to walk with her once it was over. She couldn't understand why he had acted that way. She would definitely ask him about that when he came over.

Kuyou stood there watching. When Naruto had been late to their training session he had assumed that the idiot had once more skipped it. But instead he'd shown up about an hour late demanding training. For whatever reason he seemed extremely motivated tonight. He looked as Naruto stood there transformed and surrounded by his demonic cloak, two tails swinging about. Out of the middle of the cloak an arm shot out. It traveled thirty yards where a clawed hand formed and easily crushed a boulder, reducing it to fragments.

Kuyou slowly clapped his hands. "I must admit to being impressed Uzumaki-san. Not only have you reached the two tailed state you were able to form and extend your aura in just a few hours. Given your previous progress I was expecting this to take weeks."

"Yeah, well I felt the need to work off some excess energy."

"Just where is all this fury coming from? I can feel it coming off of you in waves."

Naruto glared at him. "That's none of your business."

Kuyou grinned. "Have it your own way. It's getting late and you have already made far more progress than I was hoping for. We may as well end this."

"You go if you want; I'm not tired at all." He formed two arms out of the red chakra this time. He reached out with them to grab a small tree. He easily pulled it up out of the ground and then snapped it in half.

Kuyou watched. *His body is becoming more used to the power; his transformations are growing stronger and more stable. Everything is on track.*

The next morning Naruto found Moka standing in the lobby nervously waiting for him. The usual crowd of adoring boys nowhere

to be seen for once. As soon as she spotted him she ran up to him. "Naruto-kun! What happened? You never came by last night, and this morning I waited half an hour to work out with you. Are you feeling all right? Are you sick?"

He shook his head. "I'm fine Moka-chan. Last night I figured you'd be busy with your interview so I just decided to train. This morning I was feeling a little tired so I didn't get up early."

"But... I made dinner for you. And didn't you want to..." Her face turned red and she looked down embarrassed. "Didn't you want to spend the night with me?" She whispered to him.

Seeing her sad face made his heart ache a little. *Kami, I love her so much.* He leaned over and gently kissed her. "I'm very sorry Moka-chan, I just really got into my training and lost track of time. But I'll come over tonight o.k.?"

His kiss and his gentle tone made her feel better. This was the Naruto she was used to. "All right," having him so close she pressed her face against his throat almost by instinct. "Naruto-kun you smell sooooo good." She was worried he would reject her again. Instead though she felt a hand gently pressing the back of her head.

"Go ahead Moka-chan."

Happily she sank her teeth in and tasted that delicious blood. With his blood her mind was set at ease. Naruto wasn't upset with her after all, everything was fine. For her this was part of the special connection she shared with him. He was the only one she kissed, the only one she made love with, and the only one whose blood she drank.

Heading towards the academy arm in arm Naruto felt better. Everything was back to normal; everything was the way it was supposed to be. He looked over at her and smiled. He was sure about their love. They had already been through too much together

to have any doubts of what they shared. Nothing that Gin character did could change that. *Moka-chan would never betray me. I trust her completely.*

She saw him smiling at her and smiled back. "Naruto-kun, I wanted to tell you I won't be attending the club with you any more."

"Huh? What do you mean Moka-chan? Don't the school rules require us to be in a club?"

"Well actually Gin-sempai is shorthanded at the newspaper club and he asked me to help him out. I want to be a good friend and it sounds like fun so I agreed."

"Wait a minute." Naruto brought them to a halt. "You're going to be working with that guy every day now?"

"That's right," she said innocently. "It should be fun."

He grabbed her hand. Instead of heading down the road he led them into the nearby woods.

"What are you doing?" She asked.

"We need to have a talk in private."

As soon as they were alone Naruto told her what was on his mind. "Moka-chan, I want you to stop seeing that guy. Please don't join the newspaper club."

She looked at him in surprise. "But why Naruto-kun? He's my friend and I want to help him."

"That guy is not your friend!" He said harshly. "All he wants is to sleep with you."

She felt her face heat up at his accusing tone. "Gin-sempai isn't that way at all!"

"Oh come on Moka-chan! The flowers, kissing your hand, walking with you, and now asking you to join his club. Isn't it obvious he's just playing up to you to try and get you into bed?"

She frowned at him. "I've told him all about you Naruto-kun, he knows I have a boyfriend and he respects that. All he wants is to be a good friend to me."

"Yeah right."

"Well what about you and Kurumu?" She demanded. "Don't pretend she doesn't want to get into *your* bed. I mean she handed you a book filled with dirty pictures right in front of me!"

"Fine then, you agree not to see Gin and I'll never talk to Kurumu again."

"You would actually do that?" She couldn't believe it. "You would throw away a friend just like that?"

He looked unhappy but nodded. "Kurumu is a friend and I care about her. I would never want to hurt her like that, but the fact is I love you with all my heart Moka-chan. I would make *any* sacrifice just to be with you. And that includes not seeing Kurumu."

Moka shook her head. "Naruto-kun even though it bothers me sometimes I would never ask you to abandon a friend. But I want you to show me that same respect. Gin-sempai is a friend; please don't ask me to just abandon him."

"Moka you're being naïve, Gin is not a friend. Here," he reached out to grab her rosary.

She stepped back and slapped his hand away. "What are you doing?!"

He frowned at her. "Moka-chan you don't understand what's going on. I want to talk to the other Moka, I'm sure she can see through

this guy for what he is."

"I don't agree with you and so you want to just dismiss me?!" She said angrily. "You don't decide when my other self comes out, I do. And I don't appreciate you just wanting to get rid of me when you feel like it!"

"Moka-chan it's nothing like that!"

She crossed her arms over her chest. "Naruto-kun I am joining the newspaper club and helping out my new friend. That is my decision, please respect it."

"Fine, in that case don't come up to or talk to me until you're ready to stop seeing that guy." He stomped away frustrated and angry.

"Naruto-kun!" She called after him but he ignored her. "Don't be this way!" She ran after him.

Once they were gone a purple haired girl stepped out from behind a tree. She'd heard every word.

"Hmmm."

Kurumu made a point of looking around the table where they were all sitting. "Well, I don't see Moka anywhere."

Yukari was looking very upset. "Naruto-kun, did you and Moka-chan have a fight?"

"You could say that." He pushed the food on his tray about.

Yukari got up and grabbed his arm trying to force him to get up as well. "Come on then! You two need to make up right now!"

"Yukari, leave him alone. It's obvious he doesn't want to talk to her right now." Kurumu said.

Yukari glared at the older girl. "You're happy about this aren't you?"

Kurumu shrugged. "It was always inevitable they would break up eventually."

"We haven't broken up!" He said it a bit more sharply than he'd intended. "I still love Moka and she still loves me. We're just having a disagreement right now that's all. But I'm sure as soon as she sees the truth everything will be fine."

"But that's why you need to go talk to her." Yukari again tried dragging him out of his seat.

"It wouldn't do any good Yukari-chan. She's not listening to anything I have to say right now."

"Fine then I'll go and talk to her!" Yukari left in a determined hurry.

"Yahoo, alone at last." Kurumu leaned over and pressed her massive breasts against him. "It's almost like we're on a date isn't it?"

Bam!

"Ow!" Kurumu looked about after being hit by a snowball.

"You're not really alone." Mizore ducked back underneath a nearby table.

"Mizore-chan please come and join us." Naruto called.

"Never mind her," Kurumu said as she brushed off snow from her sweater. "I know you're upset Naruto-kun. Is there *anything* I can do to help? Would you like to come over to my place later so we can talk?"

He shook his head. "I don't think that would be a good idea. Like I've already said, I still love Moka and she is still my girlfriend."

Kurumu sighed. "I understand, but if you need me I'll be there for you anytime, and willing to do *whatever* it takes." She put her head down on his shoulder. "After all, you are my destined one."

He smiled at her. She could be a little too forward for his taste. (Though he didn't mind adult Moka when she was forward.) But underneath all her aggressive bluster he suspected she was actually a sweet and slightly insecure girl. He really did like her, but he loved Moka.

Gin had introduced her to the other three girls who made up the newspaper club. She couldn't help but notice that they were all very pretty and didn't seem to like her much. The three of them had looked her over and then left as a group, though not before sending her some hard looks.

"I don't think they like me," Moka said nervously. After the way Naruto had reacted she was having some serious second thoughts about her decision.

Gin sat down at the table next to her. He put a calming hand on her shoulder. "Oh they just need some time to warm up to you that's all." He looked at her reassuringly. "We've been together for a semester after all so of course there's a bit of a bond there. Just give it a little time and I'm sure you'll fit right in."

"Do you really think so?"

"Absolutely! And of course any problem you have I'll be only too glad to help."

She relaxed a bit, his warm open smile made her feel better. But still... "To be honest I'm not sure if this is the right choice. Naruto was really upset by my decision to come here."

"Really? From the way you described him I thought he would be more considerate of your feelings." Gin shook his head sadly. "He's

probably just afraid that he's not really good enough for you and that eventually you'll find someone who's a better fit."

"But that will never happen! I love him so much and there's no way I would ever choose anyone over him!"

"Really?" Gin's smile slipped just a bit.

She nodded eagerly. "I've told him that so many times! But he's still always worried that I'll be interested in someone else. He just won't accept that you are nothing but a friend to me. He thinks you're just wanting to take advantage of me."

Gin just shook his head with a disappointed expression. "I'm really sorry that he thinks so poorly of me."

"He even asked me not to talk to him as long as I kept seeing you."

"Did he now?" Gin was very careful to keep any hint of eagerness out of his voice. "So does that mean the two of you have gone your separate ways?"

"No! Of course not! We're just having a little trouble right now. But I'm sure that as soon as Naruto-kun realizes that you and I are just friends everything will be fine."

"I'm sure too," Gin carefully move a bit closer to her. "I mean only a fool would risk losing an amazing girl like you." He was about to move his hand slightly when both his hands suddenly grabbed her breasts.

"Ack!" Moka jumped up and away from him. "What are you doing?!"

"I don't know what happened! I swear my body just moved on its own!" He knew just grabbing her was the wrong method. (Though he certainly enjoyed the unexpected sneak preview.)

Moka had a sneaking suspicion and ran over to the window. Sure enough there was Yukari with a straw doll in her hands, the kind she

could use to control people's movements. "Yukari!"

"I don't like him!" Yukari said.

"That doesn't give you the right to do that to someone." Moka scolded.

"Now, now, it's all right." Gin said with an easy going grin. "I don't blame her for reacting like this, obviously she's upset."

Moka sent him a grateful nod. "Thank you for being so understanding. Yukari you owe Gin-sempai an apology."

"No way! Why should I apologize when he's the one causing the problem?"

Moka frowned at her. "Yukari, Gin has done nothing wrong. The problem is that Naruto refuses to believe he doesn't have any ulterior motives."

"Of course he does!" Yukari said angrily. "It's obvious even to me what he's after." She glared at the boy. "Forget about it, the only people who will ever share Moka's bed will be Naruto and me!"

Gin gave Moka a questioning glance and she immediately blushed. "Yukari that's enough! Now apologize to Gin-sempai."

"Don't you even care that Naruto is really upset about all this?"

"Of course I do! But even if I love him I can't let him tell me who my friends can be. I would never do that to him and I need him to treat me with the same respect."

In the end Yukari simply left without apologizing, the little attack on Gin had only convinced Moka that he really was just being misunderstood by Naruto and the others. Despite some misgivings she decided to go ahead and join the newspaper club.

The next morning when Naruto went out early to work out he did so alone. When he went out to get to class there was no crowd of boys and no Moka waiting for him. When he entered home room he sat down in his usual seat. A few minutes later Moka entered and sat down in her usual seat next to him.

"Good morning." She said.

"Good morning." He said.

They said nothing else to each other. When they walked to class they did not hold hands or walk arm in arm, they both went separately. He had lunch with Kurumu and Yukari. She had a working lunch with Gin. When class ended Naruto got to martial arts and then to a long training session with Kuyou. Moka headed to the newspaper room where she started writing her first story, a fashion piece on the latest trends coming out of Paris. The whole time Gin generously remained at her side being helpful and encouraging her. When work wrapped up he walked her home. Neither of them noticed as a shadow clone watched carefully from a distance.

For two full weeks the only contact they shared was when they were in the same classroom.

On Friday morning he was surprised to find a crowd of boys standing outside the dorm. Almost as soon as he stepped outside a familiar figure pushed free of the crowd and came over to him. She grabbed his arm and began leading him into the woods. "Naruto-kun, can we talk in private?"

He nodded, really happy to actually to be talking to her again. "Sure."

Almost as soon as they were alone he grabbed her and began kissing her. She gladly returned his affections and they both eagerly enjoyed a prolonged make up session.

When they came up for air Naruto smiled at her in relief. The last two weeks had been miserable, but it had been worth it. "So does this mean you're finally ready to stop seeing Gin?" He asked keenly.

A worried look crossed her face. "Uh, no, I really like working on the school newspaper and Gin is a lot of fun to work besides."

He was surprised, he'd been sure she was going to tell him she wanted nothing to do with Gin anymore. "Then why..."

She glomped on to his chest and squeezed with vice like strength. "Naruto-kun I miss you! I miss us! Can we please stop this stupid fight? It's been two weeks and Gin hasn't done anything even a little inappropriate! Isn't that proof that he wants to just be friends and nothing more?"

"It's proof that he has a lot of patience."

She let go and looked up at him unhappily. "You still don't trust him?"

"No," he said flatly.

She sighed. "All right then, I'd really hoped we could all be friends but I guess that would be asking too much. I won't ask you to like him Naruto-kun, and I won't ask you to trust him, but I *will* ask you to trust me. If he tries anything even a little weird I'll quit the newspaper club and never talk to him again. Even if he wants something to happen between us can you trust that I won't let it happen?"

"Moka-chan I've always trusted you, it's him I don't trust."

"Naruto, what are you really afraid of? He is not Saizou, he is not going to try and force me to do anything and there's no way I'll consent to do anything, so what is there to be so afraid of?"

When she put it that away she made it sound reasonable. After observing the two of them with his shadow clones he had to admit that after two weeks nothing had happened. If Gin had been Saizou

he wouldn't have been able to control himself this long. Maybe... maybe he had overreacted a little. He still didn't trust Gin as far as he could throw him, but he did trust her.

"I... I guess you're right Moka-chan." He wrapped his arms around her tight. "I trust you, and I guess you can handle things with him." He leaned down and kissed her again. "I've really missed you, and I'm sick of us being apart."

"In that case let's spend the whole day together tomorrow!" She said happily. "I have to work late tonight to finish up my article but after that I'm totally free! I'll make some sandwiches and we can have a picnic. Then we can go back to my place and spend the rest of the day making love!"

He gave her a big smile of his own. "How about we skip the picnic and just spend the whole day in bed?" He asked eagerly.

Laughing she stood up on her toes to kiss him again. "That's fine with me."

Behind a large tree Mizore watched silently as they noisily kissed before leaving to get to class.

Kurumu was setting out humming a happy tune. Whatever anyone else might think she was in a good mood. Over the last two weeks she and Naruto had been slowly drawing closer together. He had yet to come right out and announce he and Moka were done. He had yet to confess his love for her. He had yet to kiss her. But she could feel the day drawing closer. They had started walking together to and from class. She had made him ramen and other meals and gotten to watch as he eagerly devoured them and asked her for more. Bit by bit she was starting to take Moka's place, and she was sure that eventually Naruto would realize that she was the one he wanted.

So she was not at all prepared to spot the two of them walking towards class arm in arm. She stumbled and nearly fell. When had

the two of them suddenly gotten back together?

"It's all over."

Kurumu turned around to see Mizore standing behind her. "What did you say?"

"It's all over," Mizore repeated bleakly. "They're going to spend all day tomorrow having sex. Even though she is still hanging out with Gin she has convinced him that it'll be all right."

"I see," Kurumu said sadly. "Well this isn't over yet. Even if they've gotten closer again I'll still win him over eventually."

Mizore began laughing.

"What's so funny?"

"You know I thought I was pathetic stalking him the way I do, but at least I have enough sense of reality to know I'd have no chance against Moka." She shook her head. "You really think you have any hope at all?"

"Naruto-kun cares for me just as much as he does for her!" Kurumu said angrily. "I know he does."

"Naruto-kun would never even speak to you again if that was what Moka wanted."

"What are you talking about?"

Mizore quickly related the scene she'd witnessed two weeks ago.

"He... he really said that?" Kurumu asked in a tiny voice.

"He really did, just be glad Moka isn't the sort to want that." Mizore shrugged. "Look I didn't tell you this to try and hurt you; I just thought you ought to know the truth. If it were just you I'd think I had a

chance to win him over for myself. But against Moka, there is just no hope. She's the one he really loves." With that Mizore wandered off.

Kurumu stood there for a little while before turning around and heading back towards the dorm and her room. *He is my destined one and I **refuse** to just give him up!*

Gin was in the newspaper room doing a little light editing as he eagerly awaited Moka's arrival.

"All alone, well how convenient."

Gin looked up from the table to see a beautiful blue haired girl entering holding a covered plate. He immediately gave her a wide smile. "Well if it isn't the lovely Kurono Kurumu, it's a real pleasure to meet you."

She gave him an annoyed look. "Don't even bother, I'm a succubus, your so called charm is wasted on me."

He gave her a playful hurt expression. "Well in that case what can I do for you?"

"It's what I can do for you. I'm going to help you get Moka, at least for tonight."

He eyed her very carefully. "What makes you think I'm interested in Moka as anything more than a friend?"

"The fact that you're male and have a pulse. Besides, Moka's the only one who can't see what's right there." She set the plate in front of him and removed the cover. There was a cake already sliced. "I'm sure you have plans to be alone with her tonight. Give her some of this cake; I've baked in a variant of a succubus love potion. As soon as she ingests it she will fall in love with the first man she sees. It won't affect males so you don't have to worry about eating it yourself."

The effects will only last a few hours, but that should be plenty for you to get what you want."

Frowning at her he pushed the plate away. "No thanks, I have my own way of winning a girl's heart."

She smiled at him nastily. "Oh you mean with that playacting you call charm? Well you're free to rely on it if you want, but I think you should know that Moka and Naruto are planning to have an all day love in tomorrow."

"What?"

"They've decided to patch their difference and be together again. Good luck convincing her once she's back in his bed. If you really want her that cake is your only chance."

He looked at her suspiciously. "I thought you were her friend, why would you help me with this?"

She looked him right in the eye. "Because I am a horrible and selfish person. I'm the sort of girl who would betray her friend and hurt the boy she loves just so she can be with him in the end. And you know what?" She smiled. "I don't give a damn, because I love him just that much."

"Thanks for staying late to finish the article." Gin told her.

"Oh no problem," Moka said. "This way I don't have anything more to do before the deadline."

"Listen, how would you like a little snack?" He set down a small cake in front of her.

"Thank you," she took a slice and began to eat it.

Gin sat down in the chair next to her. He was feeling nervous and excited. "How is it?" He asked casually.

"Good it's..." she turned to look at him.

"Something wrong?" he moved his chair so that it bumped against hers and put a hand on her shoulder.

"Uhm, I uh..." she suddenly felt her heart pounding. She'd always thought sempai was good looking, but why had she never noticed how amazing his eyes were?

"Are you all right?" He put a hand on her forehead and leaned in close. "Are you feeling a little hot Moka-chan?"

At the feel of his touch she felt warmth filling her body. She suddenly realized how close they were. She wanted him to get closer.

No! She heard a voice calling from inside her mind. **Stop this! These feelings aren't real! He isn't the one we love!** An image popped into her head, a face. A boy with blue eyes, spiky blonde hair, and the cutest scars on his cheeks. She knew this boy was really important to her, but somehow she couldn't remember why. It was as though she were in a fog; all that seemed real was Gin-sempai, the feel of his hand touching her, his dark eyes looking into hers.

This isn't real! What you feel is a trick an illusion! Naruto! Naruto is the one we both love not him! Don't do this! Don't betray his trust! Don't betray the love that we share!

The voice was desperate and she knew she should listen to it. "I need to..."

Gin pressed his lips to hers and her heart seemed to soar. The voice seemed to cry out but she locked it away, she didn't want to listen to it. All she wanted was to love the man who was kissing her now.

He had waited for her. He had decided he couldn't wait until tomorrow. After training with Kuyou he had gone to her apartment planning to surprise her whenever she came home. He waited until it was almost midnight before deciding he had to go check on her. And so he'd gone to the newspaper room.

The lights had all been off but for someone who could see in the dark that was no problem. The door hadn't been locked and he had simply walked right in. There they were. Lying on top of a table curled up in each other's arms. Both of them peacefully asleep and with contented grins.

He just stood there, looking at them for a good five minutes. A part of him hoped they would wake up; a part of him wanted them to wake up and make excuses or beg his forgiveness. That was because if they did that he knew he would murder them both.

He stood there for five minutes.

Finally he turned around and left, carefully shutting the door behind him.

When she felt the wind and leaves swirling she suddenly sat up, pretending to be caught completely by surprise. She had actually spent hours thinking about this exact scenario. She had on an old tank top and some cotton panties because she had wanted to look sexy without looking as though she expected this.

"Naruto-kun, what are you doing here? Is something wrong?"

He just stared at her with a hopeless expression. "You told me I could come to you anytime and you would do anything you could to comfort me. Does the offer still stand?"

"Always," she came to stand before him and looked up into his sad face. She took a hold of his hands. "Come with me Naruto-kun, let me comfort you."

He let her lead him to her bedroom. "For tonight, just for tonight," he said quietly. "In the morning..."

She looked up at him and smiled gently. "I understand. When the morning comes I won't expect anything. But just for tonight," she leaned up and gave him her very first kiss. "I am yours."

When the morning comes

I was really worried because I was all alone, but now I'll have someone to do things with!

I like you Naruto, I truly do!

To the other Moka there is nothing more precious than you. Were she to lose you her heart would shatter.

Whatever it is you tell me, I could never hate you.

I love you and I will always love you.

I love you very much. Never doubt that even if you do things you are not proud of, I will still love you.

I will ask you to trust me.

There's no way I'll consent to do anything, so what is there to be so afraid of?

I love you.

He opened his eyes to find himself standing in a cemetery. "Well this is familiar at least." He glanced at the nearby tombstones.

'Here lies Morioka Gin, brutally murdered by a jealous man.'

'Here lies Morioka Gin, who died in fire.'

'Here lies Akashiya Moka, murdered by the one she professed to love.'

He looked about. "Why am I here? I didn't want to talk to you!"

But you did human; you called on me for help. And I will help you.

The ground all around him began to shake. As he watched the cemetery began to sink and fall away. To his horror all the ground in front of him began collapsing and sinking. Soon the shaking stopped. He found himself at the very edge of a massive pit. Looking down he could not see the bottom, all he could see was what looked like endless darkness.

"What the hell is this?"

You already know. This is what you truly want. You understand don't you human?

He took a step back from the edge. "No..." he took another step back. "I don't want this."

Yes you do. Somewhere inside your heart you have always wanted this. Embrace your destiny; this was fated to happen from the moment we were joined together.

"No!" He shouted. "This isn't what I want! All I ever wanted was..."

Love? He could hear the Kyuubi's laughter rumble from out of the pit.
Is that what you want?

"I love you." A sweet and familiar voice spoke.

He turned around. "Moka?"

She was there not fifteen feet from him. Her clothes had all been tossed aside; she was lying on the cold earth beneath one of the tombstones. Lying on top of her was an equally naked Gin. He stood there and just watched as Gin penetrated and began to thrust in and out of her. He heard her gasp as he first entered her, and then he heard the familiar groans and cries as she began to really enjoy what was happening. He was intimately familiar with those sounds,

hearing them had always made him happy, always excited him. But now...

"Stop it," he whispered. He wanted to look away but couldn't. Her groans began coming faster and getting more desperate. He could see the look on her face. "Stop it."

"Moka-chan!" Gin called.

"Gin!" she cried out joyously as she began to climax.

Hearing her call out another man's name like that cut him like a knife. "I SAID STOP IT!!" White hot fire poured out of both hands and consumed them. They both managed to just begin to scream before they were silenced. There was only the slightest whiff of burning meat. The fire was so hot it turned them to ashes after just seconds.

From inside the pit the fox's laughter boomed out again. **Is that the love you so treasure?**

He collapsed to the ground. "Please stop, I can't bear this! I can't bear to hurt like this anymore." *Why? Why did you do it? I thought you loved me.* "I can't bear this pain, it's too much." He really did feel that he was at his end. This final betrayal, he didn't think he had the strength to overcome it. *I trusted you Moka-chan, how could you?*

Embrace your destiny and you need not suffer like this any longer. Embrace the darkness and no one will ever again be able to hurt you like this.

"Really?" That at least sounded good.

You must give up these silly notions of love and happiness, such things are not for you. Love only yourself, live only for yourself, and you will never suffer like this again.

"Love only myself? Is that really the answer? Can't I love someone else?"

And when has your love for another ever given you anything but pain?

In his life he had loved only three people, the old man, Iruka, and Moka. Twice he had suffered when he had learned they had died without his having a chance to say good bye. But that had been nothing compared to the pain of Moka's treachery. He got up and walked back over to the edge. Looking down it really did seem to be bottomless.

Just one step and you will never again endure the pain of betrayal. Embrace the hatred and rage inside and you will know savage joys and pleasures. Let go of the humanity that holds you down. Take but one more step and you will never again suffer as you have.

Looking down into the blackness he had the sudden urge to do it, to just jump and finally be done with it. *My hatred and rage have never hurt me, they've actually helped. It's my love and trust that always cause me pain.* He looked down and felt the urge to do it. He shut his eyes and took a deep breath.

"No."

When he opened his eyes he was lying on a soft bed with Kurumu draped across him. She was asleep and he could see a small smile on her face. Not wanting to wake her he slowly and carefully slipped out from underneath her. He got his clothes and got dressed as quickly and quietly as he could.

"Naruto-kun?" a sleepy voice called. "What are you doing? It's not even light out, come back to bed for awhile."

As he put on his jacket he leaned over and gave her a quick kiss. "I'm sorry Kurumu-chan; I didn't mean to wake you. I always work out around this time and I really want to follow my routine."

She sat up in bed, not giving her nudity any thought. "If you want to wait a little bit I can make you breakfast."

He shook his head slightly. "That's o.k."

"Can... can we at least have lunch together later?" She asked a bit worriedly. Despite what she's said earlier, she'd given her virginity to the man she loved. She didn't want him to see it as something cheap and meaningless.

He smiled at her and gave her another kiss, this one a bit longer. "Yeah, we can have lunch, how about I meet you in the lobby at noon?"

"That sounds great," she spoke in an impulsive rush. "You know that I truly love you right? I really do."

He looked over at her. "Please don't."

"What? What do you mean?"

"Please don't love me Kurumu-chan. I don't want to love or be loved by anyone. We can have sex, we can go out on dates, and you can call me your boyfriend. I'll do everything I can to treat you well like a boyfriend should. But don't love me."

She stared at him, not sure what to make of his strange declaration. He was her destined one, the one she was meant to spend her whole life with. She really did love him. She wanted him to love her as well. She wanted him to love her with the complete abandon he had shown with Moka. She wanted him to show her that same passionate and total adoration.

"Naruto-kun I... I just..."

"Let's talk about this later, o.k.?" He performed some hand signs and was gone.

The pre dawn light was drifting in and she was slowly stirring awake. She felt a little stiff and her back ached a bit, but she was aware of a familiar warmth. Instinctively she smiled and pressed her face against his chest. She couldn't remember the details; everything from last night seemed foggy, but it didn't matter. They were finally together again. *Naruto-kun*. She wanted to breathe in his delicious scent. And that was when she realized something was really wrong. *This scent, it's not Naruto-kun's!*

She opened her eyes and came fully awake. She was lying on top of Gin and they were both completely naked. "No!" She pushed off and scrambled away desperate to get some space between them. *Oh what have I done?!* Her brain quickly processed that they were in the newspaper room and that they'd been lying on top of one of the work tables. And to her disgust she also realized there was something sticky all over her thighs. She spotted her clothes lying strewn across the floor and quickly started getting dressed.

"Morning Moka-chan," Gin was propped up on his elbows grinning at her. "You don't need to be worried, it's Saturday, no one will be coming in to disturb us."

Seeing him awake she quickly covered up her breasts and turned her back to him. "Don't look at me when I'm getting dressed!"

He laughed and continued to look as she got her bra on. "It's a little too late to be shy don't you think?"

She looked over her shoulder to glare at him. "What did you do to me?"

He looked smug. "Everything you asked me to. I have to admit I was surprised at some of the things you wanted me to do. You come off as sweet and innocent, but you're just a little bit of a freak aren't you?"

Her face turned a deep red. "What I enjoy doing with my **boyfriend** is none of your business!"

"Now, now, no need to be so hostile. I'm not trying to take you away from him, I don't mind sharing." He continued to simply lie there on the table. Unlike Moka he seemed to have no concern at all about being naked.

She hissed at him as she finished buttoning her shirt. "Sharing?! You're disgusting! The only one I want to be with is my boyfriend! Just what did you do to me last night? How did you force me into this?!"

"Force you? Oh Moka-chan that hurts! I would never force you to do anything. You were the one who came on to me. All I did was give you what you wanted."

"That's a lie! I would never do that!"

A voice spoke to her. ***You were drugged. There was something in the cake he gave you, probably love potion.***

The rosary is speaking to me? Does that mean the enchantment is weakening? But she put that to the side. She turned around to glare at him hatefully. "You drugged me," she said accusingly. "You drugged and took advantage of me, YOU RAPED ME!!" She screamed at him. Even though she knew it was useless she yanked on the rosary. She wished there was a way for her to release her other self for just one minute.

He frowned at her and sat up. "That's a horrible accusation to make Moka-chan. I never force a girl to sleep with me, I don't have to resort to that sort of thing, just ask the other girls in the club if you want. And even IF what you say is true there's no evidence so it would just be your word against mine."

She grabbed the rosary and yanked it one more time with all her strength, but it didn't give way. *Oh! If I could just let my other self out right now!* "You're despicable! Naruto was right about you from the start wasn't he? All you were ever interested in was this. You were

never interested in my friendship; you were just wanting to sleep with me!"

Gin shrugged, now that he'd had her he didn't much care what she thought about him. "Well you are awfully hot."

She glowered at him and adjusted her skirt, she was fully dressed now. *What do I do about Naruto-kun? This will destroy him! Is there any way I can keep this a secret?*

A bitter laugh rang through her head. ***You stupid, stupid girl, haven't you noticed it yet?***

Noticed what?

Take a deep breath of the air in this room and concentrate, see if you can't find something familiar.

She did as her other self instructed, and was able to pick out a scent that was several hours old. *Naruto-kun's scent! He was here?*

He was probably worried and came here to check up on you. He knows.

Oh Naruto-kun what have I done?! How can I ever win back your trust? I have to find him! I have to explain what happened and beg his forgiveness!

Before you do that, take another deep breath. There's one more scent you should recognize.

Moka took another deep breath and tried to sort through the various scents. Sure enough she found one that was about half a day old.

There was a sudden loud pounding on her door.

"Hold on, I'm coming!" Kurumu answered it. "Moka, what..."

"YOU BITCH!!" Moka screamed as she punched her right in the face knocking her down. "You gave it to him didn't you?! You baked that cake he gave me and you put some sort of love potion in it didn't you?"

Kurumu looked up at the girl and got back up to her feet. "So what if I did? I was just trying to help you and your precious Gin-sempai."

Before Moka could make another accusation she noticed a scent that was heavy in the air. She looked at Kurumu and felt her heart starting to break. "Naruto-kun's scent, it's all over you."

"That's right," Kurumu said proudly. "After he saw the way you betrayed him he came to me for comfort."

"I never betrayed him! I was tricked, I was raped! Thanks to you!"

"Oh don't try and blame this all on me!" Kurumu shot back. "I may have given the last little push, but who was it that was so infatuated with Gin? You stayed right by his side even though you knew it was hurting Naruto."

"I was trying to be a friend! I was never interested in him as anything more than that."

"Are you sure? Not even just a little? Everyone told you what kind of guy he was and why he was giving you so much attention. If Naruto told me my seeing someone bothered him I would stop seeing him."

"Maybe unlike you I care about people's feelings! Maybe I'm just not as selfish as you are!"

"Oh I don't know, abandoning Naruto for a couple weeks to hang out with your new *friend* seems pretty selfish to me."

"If I had known what he really wanted I never would have done it, and any way this doesn't change the fact you helped him rape me."

Kurumu smiled smugly. "I'm sure you hated every second of it."

Screaming Moka attacked her. Kurumu transformed and was able to easily pin Moka against the wall. She placed her razor sharp claws over her throat. "Stop this Moka; I don't want to hurt you."

"You don't want to hurt me?! What do you think you did?"

"I think I showed him who he should be with. I'm sorry I hurt you Moka, I really am. But I love Naruto-kun too much to lose him to you."

"I love him too!" Moka cried out. "He is the only one I have ever loved! He took away my loneliness and I can't imagine not being with him!"

"Well you don't have to imagine, because you're not with him anymore. I am his girlfriend now." She let go of Moka and gave her a slight push towards the door. "Now leave."

"I'm going to tell Naruto the truth about what happened and about what you did."

"You tell him whatever you want," Kurumu shot back. "I'll deny it. Who do you think he'll believe? His adoring girlfriend or the slut that he caught naked with her sempai in a classroom?"

"We'll see who Naruto-kun believes." Moka said as she left.

Gin had just gotten dressed and was getting ready to leave when there was a light knock on the newspaper room door. He had a sudden hopeful smile. *Maybe Naruto tore her apart and she needs a shoulder to cry on.* He certainly wouldn't object to giving her some comfort. "Is that you Moka-chan?" He opened the door.

"No, not Moka-chan," Naruto had a huge smile as he grabbed the taller boy by the throat and yanked him forward. "Let's go somewhere and talk."

The two of them vanished in a swirl of wind and leaves.

I can forgive but

"You know most of the boyfriends are usually satisfied with just punching me a few times." Gin said.

"Yeah? Well no one's ever really considered me normal." Naruto replied in a calm enough voice.

"I can see that." At the moment Gin was naked and being suspended a couple feet in the air by a set of chains shackled to his wrists. He looked over at Naruto and decided to try and make a joke. "If you're planning to have your way with me I think you should know I don't do that sort of thing."

Naruto chuckled a little. "That would be a fitting punishment though wouldn't it? I mean considering what you did."

"Well, be sure to at least kiss me first and tell me you'll call me after it's done."

Naruto actually laughed. "You're a funny guy Gin, and you're brave too, telling jokes to someone who'd sooner kill you than look at you. I'm starting to understand why Moka likes you so much."

Gin's mind was racing to try and come up with some way out of this. As soon as he'd come to and found himself chained up he'd transformed and tried to bust loose. But the chains had held firm. Maybe if the full moon was out he could somehow manage it, but during day light, as a werewolf, he was at his weakest. If he was going to survive this he was going to have to rely on his wits.

"You know, as far as that goes I want to apologize to you."

"Really?"

Gin nodded and tried to seem as sincere as possible. "Honestly I had no idea the sort of bond the two of you share. Obviously I was

wrong to ever think I could come between the two of you. I hope you can understand that what happened was an honest mistake."

Naruto smiled a bit and Gin started to get a very bad feeling in the pit of his stomach. "So you're saying that fucking my girlfriend on a school table was a mistake? So did your dick just sort of *accidentally* slip into her?"

Gin could feel himself start to sweat. "I really am sorry."

"Oh, I know you are." Naruto began to approach him. "But that's only because I have the power and the inclination to really make you suffer. You're only sorry because you're afraid. If I were some weak powerless guy you wouldn't give a damn how much I had to go through because of what you did."

"Look, can you please just tell me what you want from me? I'm sure we can work something out. I'll stay away from Moka from now on and promise to never even talk to her again."

Naruto gave him a huge smile. "And what is the promise of a dead man worth?" Gin got the distinct impression that Naruto might suddenly start screaming like a madman.

"What do you want?"

"I just called you a dead man didn't I? So I want to kill you, obviously. But first I want to torture you for awhile; partly to find out exactly what happened last night, but mostly just because I want to hear you scream. This warehouse we're in, Moka and I were attacked here once. It's a long way from any where people might be, so feel free to scream to your heart's content." He created a small orange flame at the tip of one finger.

"Listen, Moka told me all about you. She told me you were powerful and willing to kill and do terrible things when necessary. But she also told me you were never wantonly cruel."

He laughed. "Did she ever mention that I was the possessive type?"

He pressed his finger into Gin's shoulder and was immediately rewarded with a loud cry.

Where is he? Where can he be? She'd spent the entire morning running around looking for him. She'd gone to his dorm and had a message sent to his room, only to be told he wasn't there. She'd checked the cafeteria, the general store, and the places he liked to work out. There was not a trace of him anywhere.

She was ready to do anything to win him back. Finding out about what he'd done with Kurumu had really hurt, but she couldn't honestly blame him. After all, she had broken their trust first. *I know if I can just tell him the truth that he'll forgive me. But I have to find him first!*

Panting Gin tried to somehow not to give into the searing pain.

"Do you want some water?"

Gin was surprised to see Naruto holding a canteen up to his mouth. Gin eagerly opened up his mouth. Naruto tipped the canteen and let him drink his fill.

"Th... thank you for that. I didn't think you were going to give me any."

"Well I don't want you to become dehydrated." Naruto said politely. "I don't want you to accidentally die on me. I plan to keep this going for weeks, maybe months. Maybe I'll bring you copies of your newspaper and let you read articles about you being missing."

He was still smiling. All through the torture session Naruto had kept that huge smile plastered on his face. Gin's arms and chest were a

mass of fresh burn scars. "You're really getting off on this aren't you?"

"Yeah I am, I guess that makes me pretty sick huh? Kind of like a guy who would drug a girl just to be able to use her?"

Gin nodded. "Yes, I admit what I did was terrible. I'll confess to the authorities and leave school. I'll never go anywhere near Moka again. You've already taught me my lesson, please, can't we end this? Haven't I suffered enough?"

"No, you haven't suffered anywhere near enough. You still don't get it do you? You're not leaving this place alive. If I decide to take pity on you all that means is that I'll kill you quicker than I would otherwise. What you did is totally unforgivable, and I'm not even talking about using the love potion. You knew from the very start that Moka loved me and that I loved her, but you didn't give a damn. You tried to seduce her away from me just so you could sleep with her one time. It didn't matter that you were going to destroy a once in a lifetime love or deeply hurt two people. You wanted to fuck her and that was all that counted. You didn't care how much pain you inflicted on anyone else, all you cared about was getting what you wanted. So tell me Gin, why should your pain matter to me?"

"But do I really deserve to die?" Gin pleaded. "I admit to being selfish and cruel and to hurting the two of you. But do I really deserve death?"

"Well I think you do, and I'm the only one who gets to decide."

"Naruto," a woman's voice called out to him. "Please stop."

He looked over to the entry way and was surprised to see Mizore slowly approach him. "You know Mizore you would make one hell of a ninja, your stealth skills are off the charts."

"Naruto, please stop this now." She continued to approach him. "I've been watching you for a while and I heard his confession. I know

what he did and I agree that he deserves to be punished, but killing him would be going too far."

He smiled at her. "Please leave Mizore; this has nothing to do with you."

"Naruto-kun, this isn't you. You're not the sort of person to be this cruel."

"Actually I am, but you wouldn't know that from just talking to me a couple times." He shook his head a bit. "I'm actually very cruel."

"No you're not," she said simply. "Maybe you try to be, but you're not. You have a kind nature, I've watched you a lot and I know that for sure."

"For my precious people I may be kind, but for him I have no mercy at all."

"I'm sorry, but you mustn't cross this line." Naruto was suddenly surrounded by ice. "I don't want you to do something you'll regret when your anger finally fades."

He looked at her in surprise. "No need to worry Mizore-chan, I'm very good at holding a grudge." He activated his demonic cloak and the ice shattered. Three tails swung about.

Mizore froze and stared at the now transformed Naruto. She could feel the immense power that surrounded him.

"You don't have to look so scared Mizore-chan. I'm not angry with you, you are one of my precious people and I won't hurt you. But I won't let you interfere either. Please go."

"Naruto, you don't want to do this."

"No, I really, really do." He looked at her. "Please go."

Seeing she could not convince him on her own she decided to leave and get some help.

When Naruto turned back towards Gin he was looking nervous.

"So the rumors were all true, you really do have a demonic aura."

Naruto smiled at him. " *And* a jealous streak. Anyway, since I'm sure she'll bring people here I think we should hurry things along."

"I've already told you everything."

"Oh I know, I just want to hear you scream some more before I kill you."

Kurumu was standing in the lobby dejectedly looking at the clock, it was almost one.

Moka spotted her and came up to her. "You're waiting for him aren't you?"

Kurumu looked at the other girl. "He's not coming; he's already an hour late."

"But you're still here waiting aren't you?"

Kurumu sighed and nodded. "I used to do this to the boys I charmed all the time. I would have them go do something and then just forget about them. They'd come back up to me the next day whining about waiting hours for me and me never showing. I guess this must be karma, huh?"

"No," Moka said. "After what you've done I'm sure karma has something much worse planned for you." Kurumu glared at her. "Anyway, as long as you're waiting here for him I will too."

"You two want to see Naruto?" Mizore walked into the lobby. "I know where he is."

Naruto was somehow not surprised to see who Mizore had brought back with her.

"Naruto-kun!!" Moka and Kurumu both shouted his name and ran up to him. He was in his normal form. He remained where he was and did not respond to either girl. The two of them came to within five feet and then halted. They eyed each other while eyeing Naruto, waiting for him to give them some sort of response. Mizore entered more cautiously trailing the other two. She was eying the spot where Gin had been. The chains were still there, but Gin was nowhere to be seen.

There was a slight smell of smoke in the air.

"What happened to Gin?" Mizore asked.

"I killed him." Naruto answered calmly.

All three girls stared at him for moment.

"Good," Moka said savagely.

Kurumu just stood there silently looking nervous.

"You really killed him?" Mizore asked. Naruto nodded. "Where is the body then?"

He pointed to a pile of blackened ashes that were below where the chains were. He held out a hand and created a flame that glowed white. All three girls had to step back as the heat from that small amount of flame felt like an open oven. "My hottest fire, it doesn't leave much behind. He actually got off a lot lighter than he deserved, I was planning to spend months torturing him. But I decided it would be best to just end things since you knew."

Mizore looked him straight in the eye. "I know what you did, what are you going to do to me?"

"Nothing," he said. "I haven't become so cruel as to hurt someone who is precious to me." He gave the blue haired girl a glance. "Not even if she has deliberately hurt me." Kurumu flinched.

"What if I tell everyone what you did?" Mizore asked.

"Then I'll have to leave the academy and never come back. But I won't hate you for it. Do what you feel you need to I won't try and stop you."

Mizore looked at him not understanding. "How can you be so considerate to me and so cruel to someone else?"

He shrugged. "I guess it just comes down to the fact that I don't hate you."

Moka turned and looked at Mizore. "Please don't tell anyone about this. Gin betrayed my trust and raped me. So far as I'm concerned what Naruto did was justice. If I could have unleashed my other self she would have killed him. Please don't punish Naruto for doing something I would have done myself if I could have."

Mizore looked at Moka's expression; she was so much more intense than he was. She could really believe that he didn't care one way or another what she did. "I won't say anything." With that she simply turned around and left.

With that the two remaining girls looked at Naruto. He seemed completely calm. He looked at Kurumu, and tried not to glance at Moka. Both girls were nervous and worried about what would happen next.

"I think you should both know that Gin told me everything before I finished with him. I know all about the cake and the love potion." He gave Kurumu a very hard look. "Why did you do it? You completely betrayed Moka and you hurt me. Why?"

She looked down in shame. "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, but I was desperate. Mizore told me how you offered to never talk to me again if that was what Moka wanted. And then she told me the two of you were about to get back together again. I love you Naruto-kun! I love you so much! You're the one I want to spend my life with, the one I want to have a family with, my destined one. And I was afraid that if you got back together with Moka I would lose you for good. I was desperate to be with you. I know what I did was horrible, but I did it for you Naruto-kun, I did it because I love you."

"You don't deliberately hurt the people you love." Naruto said. "You don't betray people who have befriended you. Do you have any idea just how much you hurt me? And what you did to Moka was even worse."

"I know, I'm sorry."

"You should apologize to Moka too, not just to me."

Kurumu turned to the other girl. "Moka I am sorry for what I helped him do to you."

Moka looked at her and shook her head. "I'll never forgive you, but so long as you never speak to me again I'll let you live, I won't even have my other self tear your wings off."

"I can forgive you," Naruto said. "But I don't want anything more to do with you."

Kurumu looked at him and felt her heart breaking. Everything had been for him, so that they could finally be together. And for one night, they finally had been. But now he was staring at her with such cold and unkind eyes. "Naruto-kun please don't say that! Give me a chance to make it up to you!"

"No," he said flatly. "You knew exactly what you were doing. You knew the sort of pain it would cause and you did it anyway. In a lot of ways you're as bad as Gin was. The only difference is that I used to

care about you. You used to be precious to me, but not anymore, you're nothing to me now."

"Naruto..." she spoke in a pleading wail.

"Please just go Kurumu." His voice was harsh and uncompromising.

He hates me now! I've really lost him! She couldn't bear the way he was looking at her. She turned and ran away. Her heart breaking with every step.

Moka was now alone with him. She looked at him with nervous fear, but also with hope. "You know that I was drugged right? You know that I would never have betrayed you Naruto-kun."

Naruto kept his eyes slightly down, deliberately refusing to look at her. "I know about the love potion. I know you weren't in control when it happened."

She noticed the way he refused to look at her. She could hear the strain in his voice. "What's wrong Naruto-kun? You know that I didn't really betray you right? I love you Naruto-kun! You mean everything to me!"

"Then you shouldn't have left me for two weeks," he said bitterly.

"Naruto..."

"I'm sorry, but I don't think I can talk to you. Can I talk to the other Moka?"

"But... but why?" She asked desperately. "Why won't you talk to me Naruto-kun?"

"Because when I look at you now I see you lying naked on top of Gin." He answered harshly.

"Ah, ah, all right," she said in a little girl voice. "Take off my rosary."

Nodding he reached out and did just that. Moka was quickly transformed into her adult self.

As soon as she was present she did something Naruto had never imagined she ever would. She fell to her knees and bowed her head to him. "Uzumaki Naruto, I beg your forgiveness! Even if it was not done of her own free will the fact is the other Moka broke the trust you had in us, while I was not strong enough to prevent it. I know the pain of betrayal and I can only plead with you that you grant us a second chance. I can only tell you that you remain the only one that we love and that both I and my other self will do anything to earn your trust again."

He said nothing as he approached her. He gently took a hold of her by her shoulders and helped pull her back to her feet. "Please get up Moka, you don't need to plead, I forgive you." He looked her directly in the eye. "And I have to ask your forgiveness as well. After I saw the other Moka with Gin I went to Kurumu and I spent the night in her arms."

The adult Moka slowly nodded. "I know, and though I once promised to kill you if such a thing ever happened I cannot fault you when the other Moka was unfaithful to you. I forgive you."

"Thank you Moka."

He was looking at her with such sadness. She reached up and touched his face, or tried to. He pulled away from her and stepped back. "What is wrong? You have forgiven us and we have forgiven you. Can we not put this in the past and be together now?"

"I'm sorry, but even though I can forgive I can't forget. I can't look at the other Moka without seeing her with Gin. My heart has shattered, and I don't think I can put the pieces together again." He sighed and looked completely beaten. "Maybe... maybe this is for the best. Maybe I'm really not meant to love or be loved. Maybe someone with a demon inside him really doesn't deserve to try and be happy."

"What are you saying Uzumaki Naruto?"

"I'm saying that even though I forgive you and the other Moka, I still can't be with you. Loving others has only ever caused me pain, so I will stop loving other people. From now on I will love only myself."

Moka stared at him. "Won't you be lonely?" she asked in a sad voice.

"Probably," he handed her back the rosary. "But maybe for me there is no avoiding it. Anyway, I think I'd rather just be lonely than to hurt like I do now." As he gave her back the cross he let his hand brush against hers. "Goodbye Moka." He performed the hand signs and was gone.

Moka was all alone.

She slipped the rosary into a pocket. "You are a fool Uzumaki Naruto," she choked out as bitter tears began to run down her cheek. "A fool."

An awfully long wait

Author's Notes: First off I would like to thank everyone for getting this story over a thousand reviews. It's always good to see a story get so much support and I always appreciate it. Please continue to read and review.

Now along with the good there is occasionally some bad. I have gotten quite a few reviews upset with the direction the story has recently taken. Some of the complaints have been about my use of rape while others have been more general complaints about the amount of angst or the fact Naruto is taking a dark turn. A few have written to say they are done reading this story.

To those of you who do not like my use of rape I am sorry if you feel it is inappropriate, but this story is rated M for a reason. Given the situation it fit with the motivations of Gin and Kurumu as well as the over trusting nature of teen Moka. I thought it a fair dramatic devise. (And unlike my lemon scene I have no second thoughts about it.)

As for the angst, well, what can I say? I wanted some drama and drama comes from conflict. If it was too much for some I am sorry, but I think it helped the story and I did not want any part of Naruto's life totally free from conflict.

As for Naruto being darker I have only this to say, his upbringing in this story is COMPLETELY different from what it is in the manga. It would not make sense for him to be the same happy and goofy fellow given such radical differences. Also he is actively seeking to gain more and more of the Kyuubi's power which leaves him much more vulnerable to the demon lord's influence.

To those who have written that they are done reading this story I say that I am sorry you didn't like it. BUT I will never change a story simply to make more people happy. Anything that elicits strong reactions will engender hate along with love. I actually don't mind

when someone writes a two hundred word review telling me how much they hate my story. I take it as a compliment that something I wrote was able to cause such a reaction. The worst thing for a writer isn't criticism it's apathy. Believe me; I much prefer getting a ton of reviews with a certain number of them being negative to writing ten chapters and getting fifteen reviews. If you do not like what I have written then it is your choice to stop reading it and you should stop. Just as it is my choice to write the story however I see fit. After all for both the writer and the reader the only motivation is enjoyment. I will continue to write the story I want to for my own pleasure and the pleasure of those of you who do like it.

Monday morning had come again. As he put his uniform on he thought bleakly about what it would be like seeing the three girls in homeroom. Mizore he wasn't really worried about, she never said anything in class anyway and he couldn't imagine her causing a scene. By comparison he could easily picture Kurumu or Moka making huge scenes. Then again he could also picture both of them trying to pretend he didn't exist. That was probably the best he could hope for now that he'd rejected their feelings. Seeing Moka would definitely be the hardest part of dealing with the girls. In his head he understood that she really hadn't chosen to sleep with Gin. The worst thing she had done was to discount his pleas and ignore him for those two weeks. That he could have easily forgiven.

But no matter what his head understood in his heart she had betrayed him. He really couldn't look at her anymore without being reminded of the two of them lying on that table. It was hard for him to trust others and he had trusted her completely. And even though he knew the circumstances he couldn't make himself just get over it. The sight of them two of them had shattered his heart and he didn't know how to put the pieces back together again.

As he put on his jacket he thought yet again about the Kyuubi's offer. It scared him how appealing it sounded. To just let the darkness win, to finally give up on his humanity and really turn into a monster, not

just on the outside but on the inside. He knew he was already becoming a monster, his hatred, his anger, and his cruelty just kept getting stronger. Gin was just more proof of how easy it was becoming for him to do horrible things to the people he did not care about. It was caring that was hard for him. The idea that he could just stop caring had a strong attraction for him.

He understood that if he said, 'yes' and took that last step it was forever. If he let the darkness consume him he would lose his humanity, and he would never have the strength to regain it. Despite everything he'd suffered, all the pain and betrayals he still wasn't ready to just give up. He still had at least a sliver of hope that even if he could not gain love maybe he could find just a little bit of happiness. He wanted to still have precious people in his life, people who mattered to him. He didn't want to be *completely* alone. He didn't want to stop caring about everything but himself. But love? Trust? No, those things only led to pain. He was willing to have some people be precious to him, people he would care about and protect, but he would not love or trust anymore.

As he went down to the lobby he was surprised to see many of the others looking rather nervous about something. He understood when he stepped outside. There, waiting patiently, was Moka. But not the sweet innocent Moka. The boys weren't crowding around to tell her how much they loved her. They were dashing past with their heads held down. They wanted nothing to do with the scary vampire. For her part, she seemed to not even notice them.

"Good morning Uzumaki Naruto."

"Moka? What are you doing here?"

"Since we share the same home room do you object to walking to class together? I ask only to walk beside you, nothing more."

He stared at her. "Moka, I meant everything I said."

"I have not forgotten Uzumaki Naruto. You stated that you could not be with me or love me. Does that also mean you wish to never speak to me again or deal with me in any manner?"

"Uh, to be honest I kind of figured that since we were broken up you wouldn't want anything to do with me. That's sort of the way it usually works isn't it?"

She shook her head slightly. "You are among the very few whom I have a connection too. I have no wish to completely sever the ties between us. I understand that you no longer desire me to be your lover or girlfriend. I am ready to accept whatever role you are willing to grant me."

He just had to stare at her. He really didn't know what to say. He'd expected either to have the teenage Moka ignore him or else have her hanging on him pleading for him to reconsider. He scratched the back of his head. "I... I guess we can still hang out I suppose. Just so long as you understand I don't feel anything for you anymore."

"Nothing at all?" She asked coolly.

"Nope, nothing."

"I see."

Before he could do anything she grabbed him by his jacket and yanked him forward. Her mouth pressed down onto his in a savage and passionate kiss. After a few seconds she let go of him and stepped back smoothly. Looking at her she seemed as calm and detached as she had a moment ago.

"What... what the hell was that?" He'd meant to sound outraged but somehow his voice came out kind of hollow.

A slight grin touched her lips. "You are blushing."

"That's not the point! Why did you kiss me?"

"I wished to see whether or not you truly had no more feelings for me."

"I told you I don't care about you anymore!"

"Liar."

A low growl came out of his throat. "If you're trying to play some stupid game with me..."

She held out a hand and he stopped. "This is no game to me Uzumaki Naruto. It is entirely serious. You have told me your stance, that you care nothing for me. Now let me tell you mine, I still love you and so does my other self. I realize how deeply you have been hurt and that you are sincere when you say you do not want to be with me. I am willing to accept that, for now. But you should be aware I am ready to do whatever I must and wait as long as is required to one day be worthy of your trust again."

"You've got an awfully long wait ahead of you." He said dryly.

"That is all right," she seemed just a little amused. "Vampires have extremely long life spans."

He looked at her for awhile before finally answering. "Don't try kissing me again." He headed towards school.

She fell into step beside him. She made no attempt to hold his hand or put her arm around his.

They walked together in a silence that was not comfortable. As they did Naruto noticed the wide berth all the other students were giving the two of them.

"This reminds me of that time with the Djin." He said quietly.

"This is how I have always been treated in my true form." She looked over at him. "As I told you many times, those boys who worship my other self were always bound to react this way. I never expected anything else."

"Why are you the one here right now?" Naruto asked.

She quirked an eyebrow. "Did you not say you could not bear to look at my other self? Is it not easier for you to deal with me rather than the other Moka?"

"That's true," he admitted. "It is a lot easier for me to talk to you. But won't this ruin how everyone else sees you and the other Moka?"

"They are not the ones who matter to me."

As they approached the academy there was a large crowd of boys gathered out in front. As they approached they could see a certain girl dancing and jumping about to the approval of her audience.

"Yahoo!" Kurumu shouted. "Who do you love best of all?"

"You!!" All the boys chorused.

Seeing this Naruto was greatly relieved. "I'm glad to see Kurumu has gotten over me so quick. I guess what I said didn't hurt her that bad after all."

Moka glanced over at him. "You really are an idiot sometimes." She muttered under her breath.

He looked at her. "Did you say something?"

"I said you really have it right sometimes, she has obviously put you behind her."

In the classroom most of the students were staring nervously in Moka's direction.

"Moka," Nekonome-sensei spoke a bit uncomfortably. "You do realize that the first rule of this school is to maintain a human disguise at all times. Why are you in your true form?"

"I have decided to attend class in this form for the foreseeable future. My reasons are my own." She lifted an eyebrow. "Will that be a problem?" As she'd expected Nekonome quickly shook her head. Occasionally there were certain benefits to being an intimidating vampire.

From the back of the class there was loud high pitched laughter. "Oh Keito you are so funny! I just love a man with a good sense of humor!"

Naruto looked over and saw Kurumu leaning out of her seat to flirt with four boys who were ogling her breasts. *Wow, she sure got over me fast. I guess she wasn't really that in love with me after all. Still, I'm glad she's all right now.*

"Now then class, we have something very important to take care of today. With the school's annual cultural festival and other activities coming up we need to work hard to organize all our efforts. Therefore today we will elect a class representative to join the Academy School Committee. Would anyone like to nominate a candidate?" In the back row a girl raised her hand. "Yes Mizore?"

"I nominate Uzumaki Naruto."

"Nani?" Naruto hadn't really been paying attention.

"I too think Uzumaki Naruto would make a fine class representative." Moka said.

Everyone else fell into line supporting the nomination. Naruto was about to object when he recalled the headmaster mentioning something about suspecting a member of ANTI-THESIS being on the School Committee. He needed to find the leaders of that group

and expose them. *I haven't had any luck so far, maybe this will be a good way to investigate.*

"Does anyone else want to nominate a candidate?"

"I nominate Kurumu-chan!" A boy said.

"Be quiet!" Kurumu snapped at him. The boy immediately began to whimper like a hurt puppy. "Please ignore him sensei."

"Well then, if there are no other nominations it looks like Naruto will be our class representative." Nekonome-sensei said.

"Congratulations."

Yukari was staring at the adult Moka with an open mouth.

"Oh that's right," Naruto remarked. "You've never seen Moka in this form have you?"

"You need not be afraid Yukari." Moka said. "Though I am a different and more serious Moka from the one you know I still remain your friend and will not harm you."

Yukari was taking it all in, the long flowing silver hair, the blood red eyes, and the sense of ominous power that hung over her. *I think that I'm in love!* "I LOVE YOU!!" Yukari leapt and tried to glomp onto Moka's chest. She ended up lying face down in the grass with a bump rising on her head.

"Do not try that again." Moka calmly sat down at the outdoor table next to Naruto.

Rubbing the back of her head Yukari sat down as well. "I thought you said you weren't going to hurt me?"

"That does not mean you may grab on to my breasts as you did with the other Moka. The only one I will permit to do that is Naruto." He

immediately turned a deep red.

They weren't seated long before Kurumu came past leading seven or eight boys. The queen with her court. She trailed past their table talking and laughing, and making a point not to look at them.

"That blue haired slut!" Yukari said angrily. "How dare she do something like that?"

"It's all right Yukari," Naruto said as he began to eat. "She won't be eating with us anymore."

"Really?! That's great! And since you two are finally eating together again that means everything is back to normal right?"

"No," Moka said quietly. "I am afraid Naruto and I are no longer a couple, we are..." She hesitated and looked over at him questioningly.

He thought about it. "Friends, we can try and be friends."

"What? But didn't you two spend Saturday making sweet love?! What went wrong? Did that jerk Gin do something?"

"A lot happened over this week end Yukari." Naruto said. "I'll tell you about it later." *Some of it I will.*

Following class Naruto reported to his first meeting of the Academy School Committee.

"Greetings," an older student with glasses greeted him. He had a friendly smile. "I am Kaneshiro Hokuto, President of the Academy School Committee."

"Hello, I am Uzumaki Naruto, class representative from freshman class 3."

"I have heard of you Naruto-kun, you've made quite a reputation for yourself. You should know, we have never had a member of the Student Police Committee join us before. We are all quite honored, though a few members are also a bit nervous."

Naruto-kun? "Yeah, I've noticed that the Police Committee has that effect on people." Naruto smiled at him. "Are you of the ones I make nervous?"

"Not at all! Actually I admire you for your efforts to defeat ANTI-THESIS."

"Is that so?"

Hokuto nodded. "Yes, that group is determined to spread violence and chaos throughout our precious academy. I am determined to stand firm against them and the threat they represent. I hope you don't think it sounds silly, but I dream of changing this school one day. I want this school to achieve real peace, and I hope that the school festival will help bring that peace a good deal closer."

"You're an idealist then?"

Hokutu nodded. "I hope you don't find that silly."

"Not at all! Everyone should have dreams and work to make them come true."

"Really, and what are your dreams?"

Naruto gave him a wide smile and answered in a friendly voice. "My dreams are none of your fucking business." Startled Naruto saw anger flash in the other boys eyes for just a second. The friendly mask came back up again.

"I see, I apologize if my question offended you."

"No problem, and just between us I don't think you'll need to worry much longer about ANTI-THESIS."

"Really? May I ask you how you can be so certain?"

"Well, everyone will know about it by tomorrow any way." He spoke quietly. "Kuyou has discovered one of their leaders. He will be making an arrest within the next hour. I'll need you to keep that secret of course."

"Of course."

"Well I guess I'll see you inside." Naruto headed into the building.

"Yes I'll be there in just a bit."

What was that? Hokutu wondered. Was he telling me the truth? If it was true why would he tell me even if I am the President of the Committee? But why would he tell me something like that if it was a lie? Was it a joke? Was he trying to impress me? He had to decide what to do with this possible information. Should he act on it or not? As president if he failed to show up for the meeting it would look suspicious. But there might be another way to deliver a warning to Mako and Kiria. He waved over a representative who had just arrived.

"Mizuki," he whispered to him. "I have a job for you."

As Mizuki quickly departed he did not notice as a crow took to the air and began to follow him.

As the meeting ended and the various members went their own ways none of them noticed as crows and rats began to trail them.

When Naruto finally got back to his room he saw a crow waiting outside his window. He opened the window to allow the bird to enter. Once it was inside there was a puff of smoke as the henge dropped and the shadow clone again became a copy of himself.

"Anything interesting?" The original asked.

"Maybe." The clone answered.

"Show me then." The clone vanished with a puff of smoke and the original immediately got all the memories of the surveillance. As soon as he'd been chosen for the School Committee he'd wanted to follow all the members and see if he could find anything suspicious about any of them. Following all of them with shadow clones would have been difficult, but rats and crows were common and drew no suspicion.

Going over the clone's memories he smiled. "This might be something."

Your future

In the village of Konoha.

"You wished to see me Hokage-sama?" Jiraiya noted that the Hokage seemed to be in an unusually positive mood.

"I did indeed Jiraiya-san; I have just received a most encouraging report and wanted to share it with you." He handed the file over.

As soon as Jiraiya saw who the report was on he read with interest. "Three tails?! He's already accessed that much power since I visited him?"

The Hokage nodded. "At this rate it seems likely he will have accessed the Kyuubi's full power within a year."

"Hokage-sama, please limit your expectations. While it is certainly surprising he could gain this much power in so short a time we cannot expect this rate of growth to continue. Each new tail increases his power level exponentially. The two tail state is twice as powerful as the one; the three tail state is twice as powerful as the two. As the sheer volume of chakra increases he will find it more and more difficult to maintain control."

"Nevertheless it now seems clear that my decisions regarding him were correct. Both by sending him to that academy and having that seal placed on him he has been motivated to acquire the Kyuubi's power."

"That is what scares me," Jiraiya said. "He's definitely motivated all right."

"You still have concerns about his loyalty?"

"Damn right I do! That kid has no reason to love us, just the opposite. Like I already said, Kami help us if he ever gets that seal

removed."

"I have faith in the loyalty created by the seal. I also have faith in your unquestioned skill. He will serve Konoha because there is no other option for him save death. However, I agree with you that it would be best if he wanted to serve of his own free will."

"There's no chance of that now."

"I am not so certain. So far he has only seen the negative aspects of serving this village. Perhaps it is time he were shown some of the positives. He is sixteen and of an age to both inherit and marry. I will authorize you to reveal his identity to him and what I intend once he returns."

Jiraiya looked at the Hokage in surprise. "Are you sure Hokage-sama?"

The Hokage looked back also surprised. "You are the one who has been arguing for more humane treatment. I thought you would have supported this idea."

"I just think it would be better to wait until his return to the village. Finding out the truth of his heritage will be quite a lot to take in."

"True, and hopefully it will provide him with even greater motivation. In addition to taking certain documents with you, you will be escorting someone..."

Naruto was sitting at a small desk at the Student Police Committee's headquarters. In front of him were three student personnel files. One was of the student Committee President Hokuto, one was of class representative Mizuki, and the last was of a mysterious third year student named Kiria.

"Hokuto and Mizuki are both definitely members of ANTI-THESIS, And given Hokuto's position he's probably one of their leaders. Let

me arrest them and find out what they know."

Kuyou frowned at him. "What is your reason for suspecting them?"

"The second I met Hokuto there was something about him I didn't trust. I've been wearing one sort of mask or another all of my life. I can spot some them easily and I knew Hokuto had one. I insulted him and he let it slip for just a second. Beneath that cheery and wholesome image is someone with a whole lot of anger."

"And that is when you set your little trap?"

Naruto nodded. "The fact that he had this Mizuki deliver a message to someone is proof that all three of them are members of ANTI-THESIS, and I'll bet that Hokuto and Kiria at least are high ranking members."

Kuyou considered it, and regretfully shook his head. "I am afraid it is not enough to arrest Hokuto or Mizuki."

"Why not?" Naruto said frustrated. "You arrest students with nothing but suspicion all the time. I bring you real evidence and you won't let me touch them?"

"Hokuto and Mizuki are members of the Academy Student Committee. Unfortunately this places them in a category similar to the faculty. If we were to arrest them without significant evidence the Student Committee would come after us and the Headmaster might order us to disband. I will *not* risk this organization for any reason."

"Let me talk to the Headmaster and tell him what I have. I'm sure he'll o.k. my arresting them after that."

"Unfortunately the Headmaster is not currently at the Academy. When he returns I will inform you. Talk to him by all means, if he gives his blessing you are free to do as you like. But until then you may not touch them."

"How long until he gets back?"

"I have no idea; he often disappears for weeks at a time."

"Well that's just great! I finally get a break and I can't do anything."

"You are free to arrest this Kiria."

Naruto shook his head. "I sent out some of my disguised shadow clones to keep an eye on him. He has disappeared. He hasn't gone to class and no one has seen him since yesterday. So, the one I can arrest I can't find. The ones I can find I can't arrest. It sounds like a comedy routine."

"You are free to continue with your investigations until the Headmaster returns. But you are not to touch either of them unless I o.k. it."

"Great," he muttered."

Through the open door Keito entered. "Naruto has a visitor." The dark haired woman frowned as Moka entered the room on her heels.

"Moka? What are you doing here?"

"I was curious why you did not meet me this morning and why you were not at school."

He quickly closed the files that were on his desk. "I'm in the middle of an investigation. I don't have time to waste on classes right now."

She glanced down at his desk. "I see, and of course you no longer trust me. You did tell me once though that you had to pass your classes. If you miss too many of them you may be in danger of failing."

"That's not a problem," Naruto said. "The Police Committee members get a free ride as far as grades go. I can not even show up and I'll still pass everything with a B."

"That is absolutely necessary in order for us to maintain the peace at this Academy." Keito said in annoyance.

"Anyway, when I was first told about it I decided to keep attending class as I didn't want any special treatment." He looked directly at Moka. "I also wanted to see you as much as I could. But now I think I'll stop attending, though I'll still go to club and have lunch with you and Yukari. From here on out my priority is to gain more power as fast as I can."

"So you will be spending the majority of your time training with Kuyou or working on your investigation?" Moka asked.

"That's right, so we won't get to see each other very much from now on."

"I see," Moka turned to Kuyou. "In that case I wish to join the Student Police Committee."

"Say what?" Naruto said stunned. "No way! Absolutely not!"

"That is not your choice," Keito said coldly. "Kuyou is our leader and he alone decides who is a member. *You* would not be here otherwise."

Kuyou looked over at Moka carefully. "Why should I allow you to join?"

"I think that fairly obvious," she said coolly. "You pride yourselves on the fact that only the most elite are permitted into your group. I am a vampire, the most elite of all monsters."

"Hmph, I wouldn't say that, but there is certainly no denying that you are near the very top. If I allow you to join I expect you to carry out any orders I give you and be an active member of the Police Committee."

"Now wait just a minute!" Naruto tried to intervene.

"Very well, however I expect to be Naruto's partner on any investigations or assignments you may require of him."

Kuyou simply nodded, not surprised in the least by her request.
"That's fine, welcome to the Student Police Committee."

"Where have you two been?" Yukari asked as they had lunch.

"We have been busy with work on behalf of the Student Police Committee." Moka replied.

"What?" Yukari said in surprise. "I knew Naruto was a member, but since when did you join?"

"Since this morning, Naruto has decided to stop attending classes and concentrate instead on training and his duties within the Police Committee. I decided to join in order to be able to assist him. So neither of us will be attending class anymore."

"What? You're not going to be in school anymore?" She seemed on the verge of tears. "But I'll die of loneliness without you two."

"It's not that bad Yukari." Naruto tried to calm her. "We don't have any classes in common anyway. I'll still come here for lunch every day and I'll still go to the club, so we'll still see each other about as much as we do now."

That news seemed to make Yukari feel much better. Several tables over there was a loud, 'ooooh' as queen Kurumu's court marveled at the way she was bouncing up and down in her seat. There was also a stir coming from the opposite direction.

"Who is that?"

"Wow! What a beauty!"

"Is she a new student?"

"Please marry me!"

"So is the old guy her dad?"

"What?!" An outraged voice called out. "I will have you know I am none other than the legendary Jiraiya! Famed Toad Sage and master of the ninja arts!"

"Can you introduce us to your daughter sir?" Many similar pleas followed.

The second he'd heard that voice Naruto's head had snapped around. Sure enough, that old pervert bastard was walking towards him. "I really am Kami's chew toy aren't I?" He was so upset at the sight of Jiraiya he barely notice the young woman who was nervously walking behind him.

"What does he want?" Moka said angrily.

"Probably to tell me the Hokage needs me to donate a kidney or something." Naruto eyed the two of them as they came near. He finally noticed the girl; she obviously had to be someone important. She was wearing a beautiful silk kimono that was a light lavender with a pattern of various flowers. Her hair was a dark blue and it was done up, her eyes had no pupils and were of a lavender a shade or two lighter than her kimono's. Looking at the girl there was something vaguely familiar about her.

When she saw him looking directly at her she began to blush and press her index fingers together. She seemed very shy. Naruto couldn't deny she was very cute.

"Naruto," Jiraiya boomed out. "Good to see you again."

"What do you want pervert?"

Jiraiya's smile fell and he sighed. "Still angry I take it?"

"What was your first clue? So what do you want?"

Jiraiya's eyes were drawn to the exotic beauty sitting at Naruto's side. "Who is this? Would she happen to be your girlfriend?"

The girl in the kimono flinched a bit at hearing that.

"I am Akashiya Moka and I am Naruto's former girlfriend and current friend." She eyed Jiraiya menacingly. "You should know I will not allow anyone to harm him."

"Harm him?" Yukari asked. "I thought they were friends."

"No," Naruto said. "We are definitely not friends."

"Now, now, no need to be so hostile kid. I'm here to help you."

"That's what you said last time you bastard."

Jiraiya sighed. "I realize you don't really trust me, but I am here on orders from the Hokage. We received a report that you recently entered the three tailed state."

Damn the Headmaster! I thought he was supposed to be helping me. "I have, that is the whole reason I'm here right? You want a powerful weapon." He glanced at the girl standing behind Jiraiya. Through the entire conversation she had been shyly looking at him. "Who is she and what is she doing here?"

Jiraiya grinned and motioned her forward. "Ah, well she is a very big part of why I'm here. The Hokage thinks it would be wise for you to see that serving Konoha will not simply be a labor. He wants you to understand that you will be given a high place within the village and given many... considerations. Now I believe you two have met before."

The girl took this as her cue and gave Naruto a deep and graceful bow. It was only too obvious that whoever this girl was she was very cultured and refined.

"Naruto-san," she said in a low and gentle voice. "I am so very happy to see you again. I always wondered if you were safe and am very glad to see that you are."

He stared at her feeling a bit embarrassed. "I'm really sorry, but have we met?"

Crushing disappointment filled her face. "You... you don't remember me? I know it was a long time ago and... and we didn't really know each other long but..." She looked down and began pressing her fingers together again.

Something about her stance or the way she was pressing her fingers awakened a memory. "Hey, I think maybe I do remember you. Were you in my class at the ninja academy? You had short hair back then and wore this big beige jacket right?"

Her head came up again and bright smile lit her face. "That's right," she said happily. "You *do* remember me then! I'm so glad."

"Yeah, well I just remember a little. I was only there for a month." He had only the vaguest memory of a dark quiet weirdo who would stare at him while pressing her fingers together. "I am sorry, but I don't remember your name."

"Well in that case let me formally introduce the two of you." Jiraiya said. "Uzumaki Naruto this is Hyuuga Hinata, Jonin and accomplished medic nin, eldest daughter of the Fifth Hokage and the designated heir to the Hyuuga clan. She is also your future wife."

For just a second that last word hung in the air.

"WHAT?!" Moka jumped to her feet furious and radiating killer intent as well as powerful amounts of demonic force.

"WHAT?!" Yukari jumped up clutching her wand and glaring angrily at the newcomer.

"WHAT?!" Mizore jumped up from behind a bench and spat out her lollipop.

"WHAT?!" From several tables over, (Apparently succubus have very good hearing.) Kurumu leapt up and screamed, scaring her adoring slaves.

Naruto gulped and looked about nervously. "You're really trying to get me killed today aren't you?"

To forgive and not forgive

"How is everything?" She looked at him hopefully.

"Delicious," he told her honestly. "It's been a long time since I had curry chicken. The rice, the steamed vegetables, all of it is great. Thank you for making this for me."

Hinata had been provided a room in the girls' dormitory for the night and she had insisted on making him dinner. Amazingly he had gotten special permission from the Academy to go to her room. She had gone all out. The lights were off and there were candles burning. The food was delicious; she was obviously an excellent cook. And she had even provided a large bottle of really potent sake. It was certainly a whole different experience from the meals he'd gotten used to from Moka.

Then again, Moka's desserts had been out of this world.

"I'm so glad you're enjoying it." She looked and sounded pleased.

"You know you really didn't have to go to all this trouble."

"But I'm only here for tonight, tomorrow morning Jiraiya and I will take that thing back to Fire country."

"It's called a bus."

She nodded. "Ah, yes that's right. We will take that bus and I won't see you again until you return to Konoha. Since that won't be for years, making you this dinner was the least I could do."

Under slightly different circumstances he would have relaxed and enjoyed having such a beautiful woman serving him such a great meal. Glancing out the window he knew that potential disaster was right around the corner.

Moka was standing on the dormitory roof across from where, 'that girl' was entertaining Naruto. Though the window was open she could see nothing from her current position. She would have had to position her self across from the room to get a decent view. She'd actually thought about it, but her pride would not allow her to stoop to such tactics. *If they do anything inappropriate I will kill her and beat him to within an inch of his life.*

Yukari was also on the roof top. Whereas Moka would stand there perfectly still she was constantly fidgeting and trying to somehow get a better look. Yukari looked over at the beautiful vampire and began inching towards her.

"If you try and grab my breasts again I will throw you off this roof." Moka never took her eyes off the window below.

"You're really mean," Yukari pouted and stopped trying to get any closer. "I miss the gentle Moka. When will I see her again?"

"Not until the issues between us and Naruto have been fully resolved."

Yukari grinned at the vampire. "You're really jealous right now aren't you?"

Moka glanced at her with a frosty expression. "Jealous?" She questioned in a haughty tone. "Of that human *child* ? Do not be ridiculous."

"She is the same age as Naruto right? If she's a child doesn't that mean Naruto is one too?" Yukari began to giggle. "So wouldn't that make you a child molester?"

"You joke, but in some ways Naruto *is* still just a child. In others he is as old as I am. He can be very... surprising at times. That little girl from his village could never begin to understand him or give him what he truly needs."

"Unlike the two of us," Yukari said cheerfully.

Moka turned her eyes back down towards the window.

"You know if you want I could help things along." Yukari pulled out a straw doll. "I managed to get a strand of that girl's hair. That means I can use my magic to make her start slapping or kicking him."

"No," Moka said firmly. "If we interfere that will only anger him and make things worse in the long run. We must simply trust that nothing will occur between them."

"Then why are we up here acting like a couple of stalkers?"

Moka did not bother to answer that.

After a long silence Yukari began fidgeting again. "I'm really surprised Mizore and Kurumu aren't up here too. Though Kurumu did try and pretend she didn't care."

"I do not know Mizore well so I have no idea what her motivations are. As for Kurumu," Moka curled her lip. "I am sure she is in her room right now entertaining some of her pathetic pets."

Kurumu had on a little black dress that seemed about to burst. It revealed nearly all and left precious little to the imagination. At the moment she was curled up on her couch eagerly pressing her tits up against his chest. She'd had him with her very first smile but had still used her charm to bring him completely under her control. He'd put up absolutely no resistance.

"I just love older men," she purred in his ear.

"You have no idea how happy I am to hear that." An overly excited Jiraiya panted. This was going to make a great chapter in his next book. "Shall I thrill you with some stories of my amazing and heroic adventures?"

"Actually," she squeezed herself up against him. "Could you tell me every last thing you know about Naruto?"

"Sure, to start with..."

"Hinata-san..."

"Please stop calling me that," she said. "You don't have to be formal with me. Please call me Hinata or if... if you want Hinata-chan."

He shook his head slightly. "You're the daughter of the Hokage and heir to one of the most elite clans of the village. I don't think someone like me should be talking to you in such a familiar way."

"But of course you should! You're my betrothed," she argued. "We're going to be husband and wife some day!"

"No we're not," he wasn't trying to be mean, but he couldn't keep the anger from his voice. "Do you even know who the hell I am? Just what do you *think* you know about me?"

"I know everything about you Naruto-kun," she said in a small voice. *Why is he angry with me? I've only tried to make him feel comfortable.* "Before I came here both my father and Jiraiya spoke to me at length and I was allowed to read your classified personnel file. I know everything about you that Jiraiya does."

"Is that a fact?"

Five Hours Earlier

"So now you know the truth," Jiraiya said. They were alone in his room. Naruto was holding two documents in his hands. Jiraiya had just revealed his parentage to him and what the Hokage had planned for him whenever he returned. "So as you can see in the will you are the last surviving member of the Namikaze clan and sole heir to a

fortune worth over half a billion ryu. You will inherit the family estates and become the richest man in the village, richer even than me or the Hokage. You will also inherit your family's seat on the Council. The Hokage intends to have the entire village honor you as the son of the Yondaime, and as the hope for the restoration of the Yondaime's line. And to prove to you just how greatly the Hokage values you he is giving you his daughter to be one of your wives."

"One of?"

Jiraiya had a huge grin on his face. "Since you're the last member of one of our clans there's a special law that applies to you. You'll be allowed to take three wives in order to ensure you are able to restore your clan. And one of them will be the lovely Hinata, you will be able to call the Fifth Hokage, 'dad.' As soon as you come home you'll have wealth, women, and power, not too bad, right?"

"He's despicable." Naruto said.

"What?"

"The Hokage, he's despicable. He's a father, and a father should love and protect his children. He should want his daughter to be with someone who can love her and make her happy. Instead he condemns her to be with someone like me."

"That's a really negative way of seeing things kid," Jiraiya said unhappily. "Most guys would be jumping for joy at the news I just gave you."

"I'm not most guys." Naruto was reading the second document, it was a letter. "When was this written?"

"It was written in the few minutes he had before going to face the Kyuubi." Jiraiya answered solemnly. "That's how much he cared about you Naruto, at the very end of his life he wanted to leave you something."

Naruto said nothing as he read the letter.

My son;

As I write this to you, you are a child crying in his father's arms. When I look into your small face it breaks my heart to know what I am about to do. I beg your forgiveness son, and ask you to understand that this is the only way. I know the terrible burden I place on you and I pray you will be the sort of man who can bear it. Please understand that you are my son and I love you, but as my son you are the only one I can entrust with this awful responsibility. It is my greatest hope that all the people of this village will recognize you as the hero that you are. I had hoped that you would have your mother there to help you, but she is gone. Know that she loved you and wanted you, she held you in her arms and was content as her life ended. Though you will lose your parents and your family this night you will not be alone. I have entrusted your safety to the man I admire most, my sensei, the great Jiraiya. I hope that by the time you read this your godfather has become the father to you that I cannot be. Goodbye my son, and please know that I love you and ask you to forgive me.

Your father,

Namikaze Minato

He read it a second time, staring at the words. His mother had told him that his father had loved him. He hadn't believed her. But his father had spent the last minutes of his life writing to him and proclaiming his love for his son and asking forgiveness for the wrong he was about to commit. Somehow knowing the words were from him made a difference.

"I forgive you," he whispered.

"What did you say kid?"

"I said that I forgive my father for what he did to me. I always hated the Yondaime for what he did, but... he asked for forgiveness. I know he had a hard choice and that he only did what he had to. So I forgive him."

"I'm glad to hear that kid. I know it would make him very happy to hear that." Jiraiya eyed him guardedly. "You know you've taken the news that you're the Yondaime's son a lot better than I would have expected. I was expecting you to either be furious or shocked senseless."

"Believe me; you have no idea what a surprise it is to me." He looked at Jiraiya and gave him a big friendly smile. "You were my father's sensei."

"I sure was kid, he was an amazing person your father. I loved him like a son."

"You loved him like a son? How sweet." He took a step forward, his smile never faltering. "So I guess I'm sort of like a grandson to you, huh?"

"Well... not yet, but if you want we can work on getting to know each other once you return. My offer of training you is still open, I'd be very happy to help you out of respect for your father."

"Is that right?" he said softly and took another step forward. "You want to help me out of respect for my father, who you loved like a son?"

"That's right kid," there was something about Naruto's sudden friendliness that Jiraiya didn't like. He took a half step back.

"You never read my father's letter, did you?"

"No, it was sealed and meant only for you."

"Is there something you'd like to confess to me? Anything you want to apologize to me for? If there is now would be the time."

Jiraiya frowned at him. "Nothing comes to mind."

"I see." Naruto's fist caught him right in the middle of his face. The mighty Jiraiya had a comical look of surprise on his face as he looked up from the floor. "YOU SON OF A BITCH!!" He tossed the letter at him. "Read it! And just so you know the only reason I don't kill you right now is because of the damn seal!"

Jiraiya took the letter and quickly read through. "Aw hell, oh kid I'm so sorry. But you have to understand..."

"Oh I understand, **Godfather**. My father, who you **loved**, trusted you to take care of me. He thought you'd be like a father to me, and instead you abandoned me. And when I finally did meet you it was only so you could put that damn seal on me. Wouldn't dad be proud of you?"

Jiraiya flinched at the accusation and looked ashamed as he got up. "Kid, I'm so sorry, when I lost Minato it really was like I lost my own son. The hurt was so terrible I couldn't even bear to be in Konoha for years after that. I took a bunch of long term missions, by the time I finally got back you were long gone and I figured it was best I stay out of your life."

Naruto laughed a bit. "So basically you decided your godson mattered less than your own pain. And then you decided I wasn't even worth bothering to check up on. I was miserable! I was alone! And you didn't even care."

"Kid what did I know about being a father? I didn't think I could handle it."

"But you didn't even try! So what if you wouldn't have been the greatest dad? Maybe if people had just known Jiraiya was my godfather that would have been enough. Maybe they would have

been just a little less cruel to me. Maybe the Third wouldn't have had to send me away. Maybe I could have been a little *normal*! If you'd at last tried everything might have been different for me! But no, I guess I wasn't worth the effort."

"Kid I'm sorry."

"Well that makes it all better." Naruto struggled to keep his fury in check and to keep from drawing out the Kyuubi's power. "Just so you know godfather, I don't forgive you. Now please get the hell out of here."

"All right ki... all right Naruto. Remember, you're having dinner with Hinata tonight."

"No, I'm not. There's no way I'm marrying her so there's no point in seeing her."

"If you don't want to marry her that's your decision I suppose, but the girl came all this way to see you and really wants to talk to you. Since she's never done anything to you can you at least meet with her?"

"Is that a fact?" Naruto said. "So you know I'm a monster?"

"Naruto-kun I don't see you that way." Hinata said. She looked at him shyly. "To me you are that brave little boy who always smiled when others were being mean to him. I... I always admired your confidence and your courage. I... uhm, I always wondered what would have happened if you had stayed at the academy."

He smiled at her, a big friendly smile. "Oh, that's easy. If I'd stayed you'd have wound up hating me like everyone else."

She looked at him in shock. "That's not true Naruto-kun!"

"Of course it is! Everyone hated me, except for the Hokage and Iruka-sensei. What? Do you really think you'd have been different? What would you have done the first time the other kids cornered you and asked you why you were being nice to me? They'd have told you I was a freak and that everyone hated me, and that if you didn't do the same you'd be a freak too. After that you would have started treating me like everyone else."

"I wouldn't have!" She seemed on the verge of tears. "Naruto-kun please believe me! I always liked and admired you! I would never have been cruel to you."

He stared at her. "I remember a girl named Sakura, she had pink hair and I thought she was pretty. My first day at the academy I talked to her and she was nice to me. She even said she'd be my friend. The very next day the other girls grabbed her and explained how things were. When I tried to talk to her again she screamed she didn't like me and hit me. *That's* what would have happened if I'd stayed."

"Naruto-kun..."

He wiped his mouth and got up from the table. "Look Hinata-san, you seem like a really good girl. So I'm going to do you a favor, I'm not going to marry you. Whatever you may think you don't know me, I am not that eight year old you remember so fondly. I am a horrible person and I've given up on ever trying to love anyone. I am going to tell your father I won't marry you, and then at least you'll have a chance of being with someone who might love you." He bowed to her. "Thank you for the meal, it really was delicious."

"Wait! Naruto-kun can't you at least stay and talk with me for awhile? Even if you're not that boy anymore I'm sure something of him is still there inside of you. Won't you at least give me a chance? You might like me."

"No, please just forget about me. Believe me, it's better this way."

As he opened the door Hinata saw all her hopes about to disappear forever. "I love you!" She cried out. He stopped and turned around to look at her. "I have been in love with you ever since I first saw you. I have never once wanted to be with anyone but that brave little boy. Please let me be with you! I swear if you will just let me be your wife I will spend every day trying to make you happy. And maybe one day you'll love me as I love you!"

He stared at her. He knew that her heartfelt confession was genuine. He was deeply touched that any girl could think of him with such affection for such a long time. She really was a good kind girl.

He laughed at her. "Kami, you're an idiot!" He slammed the door as he left.

Hinata stood there. Her dream gone and her heart suddenly broken. She'd really hoped... she'd really thought... "I am a fool," she muttered as she began to cry.

Moka could sense the energy and turned around to see the wind and leaves swirling about.

"Did you enjoy the show?" Naruto asked. "It was a little uncomfortable sensing your aura all through dinner."

"I apologize if I distracted you. I actually saw nothing at all. Did your evening go well?" Moka asked calmly.

He gave her a little nod. "It was fine. Just so you know nothing happened."

She already knew that. There was barely a trace of the girl's scent on him. If there had been any significant contact she would have left a much stronger trail. "And you wanted to come and assure me of that to set my mind at ease Uzumaki Naruto?" She took a couple of steps to stand in front of him.

"I just wanted to make sure you didn't think something had happened. I don't need you beating up the Hokage's daughter."

"Is that the only reason you came to see me Uzumaki Naruto? Concern for that girl's well being?"

He was about to confirm it when his hands suddenly reached out and grabbed both her breasts. He saw the look of surprise on her face and knew it had to match his. *Oh kami she's going to kill me!*

But rather than kill him she calmly asked. "Do you wish to do this right here or back at my apartment?"

"I'm not doing it! My body is moving on its own I swear!"

From behind the door to the roof they heard giggling.

"Yukari!" They both shouted.

Naruto shun shinned back to his apartment. He materialized to find he was not alone. Kurumu was standing there in a little black dress looking worried.

"Kurumu! What are you doing here? I thought I told you that you were nothing to me! I don't want to talk to you or anything else. Get out!"

She flinched away from his anger but held her ground. "Naruto..."

He grabbed her by her shoulders and shook her roughly back and forth. "Do you think coming here to offer me sex will make everything all right?"

"That's not why I'm here!" She pulled out of his grasp. "I realize you can't forgive me for what I did, but I still want to try and help you."

"By giving me sex?"

"No, by giving you information. I was able to charm Jiraiya and get him to tell me about a whole lot of things you don't know. I've come here to share everything I found out. Oh, and just so you know I found about the seal on your heart and tried to get him to remove it."

"You did?" He said in surprise.

"Yeah, but even under my charm he wouldn't go that far. I didn't think he had any will at all, but he won't break direct orders from his leader. I was able to get him to talk though, and I even told him to forget what we had talked about, so tomorrow he'll wake up and imagine we spent the night doing freaky things."

He looked at her. "You did all that just to help me? Why?"

She looked back at him. "Because even if I've ruined everything between us I still love you! Even if you hate me Naruto-kun I'll still do anything I can to protect you. I also found out about the Kyuubi, and it doesn't matter to me."

He looked at her, amazed she would do so much for him even though he'd rejected her. "Thank you Kurumu, what did you find out?"

"Well a lot, but there are two things that seem most important. One the Hokage is so impressed by how quickly your gaining power he doesn't plan on leaving you here until you graduate. Once you achieve five tails he plans to call you back. He thinks that is powerful enough to be a big help to the village and that you'll eventually reach your full potential. He wants you in Konoha where he can keep an eye on you."

"Thanks for telling me that, I'll need to be careful not to reach the five tail state until I'm ready. Or else I need to have another talk with the headmaster."

"But that's not the most important news Naruto-kun," she said worriedly. "Naruto-kun there are people after you. Powerful people

who want the demon that's inside of you."

He grinned. "They want my demon, huh? I wish I could have met them about eight years ago."

"Naruto-kun this is serious! According to Jiraiya there are only nine demon lords that exist on or visit your world. These people have captured the other eight and the hosts that carried them were all killed by the extraction. You're the last Naruto-kun! Jiraiya doesn't think they know where you are but they're searching for you. If they find out where you are they'll definitely come for you."

"Nice that the Hokage and Jiraiya neglected to mention that." He nodded to her gratefully. "This is a real help Kurumu. How much can you tell me about them?"

"Not that much, but I'll tell you what I know. To start with their called Akatsuki..."

A special offer

Kurumu spent a couple hours relating everything she had found out to him. Unfortunately she did not have as much information on Akatsuki as he would have hoped. Apparently despite much effort the organization remained largely a mystery. Jiraiya had no idea who their leader was, what its goals were, or even the reason why they had acquired the demon lords. Among the things that were known was the fact they seemed to operate in two man teams made up of ninja of A or S rank. Despite the fact they were a secret organization they seemed to have a, 'uniform.' Its members usually went out dressed in black robes with red clouds on them. Only a few of the members were known including Deidara, Kisame, and (most alarming) Uchiha Itachi. Naruto had still been in the village when the Uchiha massacre had occurred. Any ninja that could single handedly exterminate an entire clan was definitely someone to be wary of.

Kurumu also gave him other pieces of information. Such as the fact his village had been at war for the last four years. One of the reasons the Hokage was so eager to recall him was his hope that Naruto would be the, 'secret weapon' that would finally bring the war to a victorious conclusion. He also learned that it had been Orochimaru who had killed the Third Hokage. Naruto made a special point to file that information away.

"That's everything I was able to find out." Kurumu looked at him. "Did it help?"

"Are you kidding me? It helps a whole lot. I haven't heard a thing from my village for the last four years. Now thanks to you I have a whole lot of valuable info. Including the little fact that there's an organization of elite ninja looking for me." He gave her an appreciative nod. "I truly thank you for helping me Kurumu, especially since you had no reason to."

"It's all right. Even though I know you can't forgive me I'll still do whatever I can to help you. If you ever need me all you have to do is let me know. I'll go ahead and leave now." She was about to go when Naruto surprised her. He reached out and took hold of her. He pulled her close and squeezed her tight. There was nothing sexual in the embrace. It was just his way of expressing his genuine appreciation of what she'd done for him. She had never been held so strongly, had never been so happy just to feel the simple physical connection. He did not say the words, but as he held her it felt as though he were forgiving her, at least a little. She shut her eyes and simply enjoyed the feeling. *Naruto-kun, I would walk through fire for you.*

"Thank you," he whispered to her as he finally let her go.

She nodded and put her head down. She turned to the window and let her wings and tail emerge. "Naruto?"

"Yes?"

She did not turn around. "Those boys I hang out with. You know they don't matter to me right? They're fun and a distraction, but nothing more. I could never love any of them."

He suddenly felt a little warm and a little nervous. *Why did she tell me that?* "Kurumu I..."

"You don't have to say anything Naruto. I just wanted to make sure you knew. Good night." She leapt out the window and was soon gone from sight.

The following morning Naruto was there as Jiraiya exited his room.

"Good morning godfather," Naruto called in a cheery voice. "Sleep well?"

Jiraiya looked very uncomfortable. "Please don't call me that. I think I'd rather you went back to just calling me a pervert."

"Why? Does it bother you being reminded of the responsibility you ignored? Here," he handed Jiraiya a sealed envelope. "Please deliver that to the Hokage."

"What is it?" Jiraiya looked at the thing suspiciously.

"It's a formal rejection of his request that I marry his daughter."

Jiraiya looked at the young man unhappily. "Speaking of Hinata I stopped in to check on her last night after my, uh, evening out. She was in tears. What the hell did you do to her?"

"I did her a huge favor. I made it real clear to her that she shouldn't waste any more of her time dreaming about me. Given the situation it was the nicest thing I could have done."

"Did you have to make the poor girl cry?"

"Don't *you* try and tell me how to deal with people." He turned around to go

"You are making a huge mistake."

"I doubt it," he left without another word.

"So that girl is gone and won't be coming back right?" Yukari asked.

"That's right," Naruto said and then took a bite of his food.

"I wonder why she came out here for just one day." Yukari said.

"I guess the Hokage was hoping I'd fall in love with her or something."

Yukari snorted, all the worries from the other day were forgotten.
"Like that would ever happen."

"Hinata wasn't a bad girl. I'm sure she'll make someone very happy."
He shrugged.

"But not you," Moka stated. "So what type of girl would make you happy Uzumaki Naruto?"

He was about to proclaim no such person existed when he was interrupted by a loud commotion.

"Yahoo! So who wants to bring me my lunch today?"

The dozen or so boys trailing behind Kurumu all loudly started pleading for the honor. As was her habit she led her entourage right past their table while refusing to even glance in their direction. She took them to a couple tables all the way at the other end of the courtyard.

"She does that on purpose," Yukari complained. "She is so annoying! I'm glad we don't have to put up with her anymore."

"I agree," Moka said. "She is nothing but a spoiled little girl who never thinks about anyone but herself."

Naruto glanced over in her direction, but said nothing.

Three students gathered around a table in a small room. One was a polite looking fellow with glasses. Another was a young man who was calmly reading a book as he sat down. The third was a cute dark haired girl who looked a bit jittery.

"We need to do something," the girl began as soon as they were all seated. "Naruto definitely suspects you Hokuto."

The boy with the glasses nodded ruefully. "I'm afraid you're right Mako. Looking back on it what he said to me was obviously bait for a trap. I should have ignored it, but at the time it seemed a good idea to act."

"The fact that Mizuki was so late to the Committee meeting will definitely be noticed." Mako said. "They might be hesitant to arrest you since you're the Committee President and have such a sterling reputation. But they might be a lot more willing to arrest Mizuki. If he talks it's over."

Hokuto let out a regretful sigh. "I am afraid I have to agree with you. It's a shame as he is not only fairly powerful but as a class representative he has his uses. Still, as things are he is too much of a liability."

"I'll take care of him then," Kiria offered without bothering to look up from his reading.

Hokuto grinned over at his best friend. "You're actually going to take an active role for once?"

Kiria flipped the page. "It might be entertaining and I have some free time this afternoon."

"Well that takes care of one problem," Mako said. "But we still have to get rid of Naruto."

"Won't that bring added suspicion on Hokuto?" Kiria asked.

"He is already under suspicion," Mako argued. "If we do nothing Naruto will just keep digging. He seems to be the only one on the Police Committee who is actively trying to investigate us. If we get rid of him Kuyou and those other elitist bastards will go back to just terrorizing the student body."

"Are you volunteering to kill him?" Hokuto asked.

Mako nodded. "Leave it to me. I'll even do it when you're in class or in a meeting so you'll have an alibi."

Kiria looked up from his book. "Some of our people swear he has a demonic aura and that he killed Midou with just one blow. Are you sure you can handle it?"

She grinned. "Leave it to me. I already know exactly how to do it."

In Konoha the Hokage was sitting behind his desk alone in his office. Jiraiya had delivered a letter to him from Naruto which he'd stated contained a formal refusal of the marriage alliance. A very blunt rejection letter had been in the envelope. But there had been a second letter which Jiraiya apparently did not know about. Hiashi was reading it carefully.

To the Fifth Hokage of Konoha,

Greetings Lord Hokage. I have decided to write this to you based on the assumption that you still hope to have me serve you willingly and of my own volition. Jiraiya informed me of all the plans you have in store for honoring me and giving me a high place within the village. I tend to have my doubts about your good will however given past treatment and especially given the second seal you had placed on me. Nevertheless, I have recently come to understand that men in your position often make decisions that they view as necessary for the greater good, even when it means inflicting evil on the undeserving.

My father wrote me a letter asking me to forgive him. I have done so. Before confronting my godfather I gave him an opportunity to confess to me and ask my forgiveness. Had he done so I would have been willing to forgive him as well.

I have decided to give you and the entire village the same opportunity. I am making to you a very special onetime only offer. Please consider it well.

I am ready to give up all claims to the Namikaze estates and fortune. I relinquish all claims to a seat on the Council. I will not accept my father's name or any connection to his clan. As I was denied the Namikaze name as a child I have no wish to take it now. I will not marry or father any children, so the Yondaime's line will end with me. I will ask for no special treatment or consideration of any kind from the village. I will only expect the same conduct afforded every other ninja of the Leaf. I will serve both you and the village faithfully and to the best of my ability as a loyal Leaf nin.

In short, I will forgive everything that has been done to me by yourself and the village in general. In return for all this I ask only one thing, that the seal placed on me by Jiraiya be removed and no further acts of coercion be made against me. I ask only to be treated like any other ninja. If you truly desire to have me serve the village of my own free will I ask you send Jiraiya to meet with me sometime in the next seven days.

If he does not return within the next week I shall view that as a rejection of my offer and as proof that you prefer to use me simply as a tool or weapon. If that is your choice please understand that it means you are permanently forfeiting any chance of ever earning my forgiveness or friendship. I will instead become your unwilling tool, a tool that will be bound to you only by the threat of the seal that was placed on me.

I ask you to seriously consider this offer and the value of my forgiveness and friendship.

With respect,

Uzumaki Naruto

The Hokage reread the letter and shook his head. Did Naruto really believe he was in any position to dictate terms? When he returned to the village he *would* take the Namikaze name and his proper place on the Council. He *would* marry Hinata, thereby tying the Namikaze wealth and power into the service of the Hyuuga clan. He *would*

serve Konoha as its greatest weapon and bring not only victory but a secured peace to the war weary village. And he would do so whether he wanted to or not because of that seal. That seal was enough to guarantee Naruto's obedience.

"He is still just a boy," Hiashi said to himself. "He has no sense of reality." Without formality he tossed both letters into the trash and promptly moved on to new business.

Though he did not suspect it, with his decision Hiashi had literally tossed aside the last chance to save Konoha.

From that moment on Konoha's fate was sealed.

Never hurt you

Seven days had passed since Jiraiya's visit. Honestly he was not surprised at the Hokage's decision. If Jiraiya had actually shown up he would have been amazed. Still, a small part of him was disappointed. Having found it in him to finally forgive his father he'd made the huge decision to grant the Hokage and Konoha one last chance. And all he'd asked was that they treat him the same way they treated all their ninja. If they had just been willing to extend him that much humanity...

But of course he'd known they would never do that. No, he was their tool, their weapon, and that was how they wanted it. He'd known it would end this way. After all, when had that damn village ever shown him any mercy? Now when the time came he would show them no mercy, and do it with a clean conscience and no doubts.

"What are you waiting for Uzumaki-san?" Kuyou asked. "Let's begin the training."

Naruto glanced over at the other person in the small clearing. "You know do we really need to do this right now?"

"You have something better to do with your time?" Kuyou asked dryly. "The Headmaster is still not returned so you cannot move forward with your investigation."

Naruto grumbled, that was true enough. Mizuki had disappeared. Both he and Kiria were simply gone. That left the Academy School Committee President Hokuto, who he still couldn't touch, as the only available suspect.

"You have achieved the three tail state now you must work towards the next step." Kuyou said.

"But does she have to be here watching me?" He whined.

Moka lifted an eyebrow. "You object to my presence Uzumaki Naruto?"

"Why do you have to be here for this?" Naruto asked her.

"Because I consider spending time with you more important than anything else," she said simply.

"But..."

"Yes?"

He looked embarrassed. "I don't want you to see this."

She was surprised. "Why not? I have seen you transform before."

"But... I hate the way I look when I change." He looked away from her. "I'm ugly."

"You certainly are," Kuyou agreed.

"Hey!"

"But you are, extremely ugly." Kuyou transformed into his final form. He was a slightly taller human like being; He had two fox like ears, pale white skin covered in bizarre markings, and four tails that were blazing white. "As you can see for yourself the ultimate form of a youkai kitsune is truly beautiful to behold! Even my secondary form is a magnificent sight that was worshipped by your kind. (Youkai kitsune have two monstrous forms, a fox made of elemental fire and a humanoid one.) The form you take is a bastardization of a true kitsune's final form and human." He made a face. "Personally I can think of nothing more repellant."

"Gee thanks." Naruto said.

"Do not concern yourself Uzumaki Naruto," Moka said. "You could never seem ugly to me, and besides," her lips seemed to twitch bit. "I rather like seeing you with red yes and fangs."

Her words made him blush a little. To try and hide it he looked from her back over to Kuyou. "So what is the point to me transforming without drawing the Kyuubi's power?"

Kuyou frowned. "Up until now you have actually done surprisingly well in gaining the Great Lord's power. However, from this point on you will find it markedly harder. The four tail state is an important tipping point. Up until now each increase in the number of tails has doubled your power. From this point forward your power will increase by a factor of ten. In other words the four tail state will be **ten times** more powerful than the three. And each new state will mean a similar leap in power. Until the final step, when you achieve nine tails you will become **one thousand** times more powerful than the eight tail state."

"A thousand times more powerful?" Naruto couldn't even imagine it. *The stories about the Kyuubi said he could flatten mountains with a swipe of his tail. Maybe they weren't kidding.*

Kuyou nodded. "Perhaps you can begin to understand why my race worshipped Lord Kyuubi as almost a god. When that time comes you will have to transform **fully** into a youkai kitsune in order to withstand such extraordinary levels of demonic force. But that day is a long way off. For now you must practice transforming without relying on the Great Lord's power in order to ready your body for the four tail state. Otherwise you may lose control of the transformation, which would put your life, and more importantly the Great Lord's life in jeopardy. Now stop delaying and begin."

Naruto sighed. He really hated transforming unless he had too. But there was no denying that what Kuyou had pointed out had made sense. *I can put up with being ugly for awhile if I can get ten times as powerful.* There were no hand signs as with performing a henge. And unlike when he drew on the Kyuubi's red chakra it didn't just happen automatically. He had to use his own chakra to sort of, 'will' the change. It was like his body remembered how to transform and he sort of had to coax it along to do what it already knew how to do. As he concentrated he could feel as his body slowly morphed into its

new form. Unlike using the Kyuubi's power it did not happen almost instantly, using his own power it was a slow drawn out process.

"A new born kit could do this faster," Kuyou told him.

"Shut up," an annoyed Naruto snapped back. "You're not helping any." His face felt itchy and his fingers seemed to ache a bit as they became claws. After fifteen minutes he had fully transformed.

"Finally," Kuyou muttered. "Now all you need do is remain in that form for as long as you can."

"Wonderful," Naruto muttered. The actual transformation was the hard part; he could stay like this for hours. Of course when he was drawing the Kyuubi's power his duration was a lot shorter.

As they were standing there they heard a shout. Out of the woods and into the clearing came a girl in a school uniform. Panting she looked up at them in panic. "Please help! It's the outcast ayashi!"

"What? Are they after you? Where are they?" Naruto asked her.

The girl smiled. "Right here," she said. Her index fingers transformed and suddenly shot out several feet and stabbed into the chests of Kuyou and Moka. Blood began to pour out of both their wounds.

"Moka!" Naruto cried out and ran to attack the girl. As he did so he was immediately surrounded by the three tailed cloak.

That was the only thing that saved him from death.

Just as he approached Kuyou suddenly turned around and slammed his fist into Naruto's face. As he was already transformed the blow would have been fatal except for the cloak's protection. As it was Naruto was sent hurtling into and through a nearby tree.

Smiling Mako retracted the finger from Kuyou's chest. "Ah, this is going to be fun to watch!" She smiled over at Moka who was still impaled. "You can join in and help kill your boyfriend."

Moka struggled; she couldn't seem to control her body. "Naruto... run, get out of here."

Mako laughed. "You're actually resisting my control? He must mean a great deal to you for you to fight me this hard. But that just means you need a bigger dose." Three more fingers from her left hand extended and stabbed into Moka as she screamed.

"What the hell are you doing to Moka?!" Naruto cried out. He was back on his feet and racing to get to Moka but Kuyou intercepted him. He again swung at him. Not caught by surprise this time Naruto was able to get an arm up to block, but Kuyou was much stronger and forced him to stagger back a couple steps even so.

"What are you doing you bastard?" Naruto demanded.

"Oh don't blame him," Mako said as she retracted her fingers out of Moka. "I've injected them both with some of my blood. It lets me control them just like pieces on a chess board. I'm guessing he doesn't think too much of you as it only took a little to bring him under my control. The girl though, now she must really love you. I've never had to give anyone such a concentrated dose before. But they're both mine now." She was caught off guard as she felt his killer intent come down on her with almost physical weight.

"If you've hurt Moka then I swear I'll kill you."

"Huh, I don't doubt you'll try." As he watched she disappeared from sight. "But first you'll have to kill her." A disembodied voice mocked.

As if on cue Moka moved with all her amazing speed right for him.

"Moka don't..."

She slammed her fist into his face and again sent him flying. She was definitely *not* holding back. With the Kyuubi's cloak he was unhurt but they both seemed determined to change that. Before he could even get back up Kuyou and Moka were both on top of him

punching and kicking as hard as they could. He quickly realized that he and Moka were of about equal strength, with her being faster and him being better protected. Kuyou was **a lot** stronger than he was. Naruto might have had infinitely greater potential, but at the moment he was a three tail fighting a four tail. A four tail with **ten times** greater power.

No matter how hard he tried he couldn't block their attacks as they continued to double team him and knock him around. Only the protection of the cloak kept him from being beaten to death.

"I knew this would work," Mako's voice said triumphantly. "You're completely helpless against them!"

"It's not over yet!" Desperate for a little breathing room he did one of the few things that he could do that neither Moka nor Kuyou could. He ran up the side of a large tree. This only gave him a momentary respite as they both began climbing up after him. But they could not climb as fast as he could run and it gave him the moment he needed to cast a jutsu. "**Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" All around the air filled with smoke as two hundred clones came to life. They all knew what he wanted and as one they all launched themselves at Moka. They did not punch or kick her. Instead they all tackled her on mass, burying her beneath their combined weight and pinning her to the ground.

"Come and get me Kuyou!" He swiftly leapt away to another tree and another leaving Moka and his clones far behind. As Naruto had expected Kuyou chased after him as Moka struggled to tear apart the pile of clones trying to hold her in place.

As the clones were destroyed Naruto got their memories and had to grimace. Moka was shredding them; they wouldn't be able to delay her more than a few minutes. Even so the clones continued only to try and hold onto her, they would not attack her. As he was running Kuyou unleashed a huge wheel of white fire that caught him in mid air and sent him crashing back down.

"You should know fire can't hurt me while I'm like this."

Kuyou made no reply as he instead came right at him. Naruto had noted that neither of them had said a word while attacking them. He guessed that had to mean that while their bodies were being controlled their personalities were being suppressed. That was fortunate as Kuyou had some idea of what he was capable of and probably wouldn't have been stupid enough to come straight at him. He began making hand signs. *Fire won't hurt him, but I have other weapons.* Just as Kuyou was on top of him he completed the jutsu. "**Kamikaze no Jutsu.**" Knowing Kuyou had the edge in raw power and knowing Moka was on her way Naruto decided he could not afford to fool around. The divine wind was his most powerful wind based attack and he gave it every scrap of energy he could, designed to level an area miles wide with hurricane force winds. He concentrated it into as small a space as possible and unleashed it.

Kuyou and a section of forest about 500 yards wide were flattened. He checked and saw Kuyou was still alive, he had several deep gashed and was buried underneath several tree trunks.

The jutsu had worked well, but taken quite a bit out of him. And Moka was on the way. No matter what happened he was not going to hurt her. He was ready to make any other sacrifice so long as it meant Moka wasn't hurt. "**Kage Bushin no Jutsu .**" This time, despite putting his best effort into it only thirty clones came into being. He could feel the strain beginning to tell. He was starting to reach his limits with the Kyuubi's power. He really had to end this quick or Moka just might kill him.

"You know what to do." The clones all nodded and grimly set out to carry out his plan.

Moka soon found him. None of the clones he'd made had delayed her and she came right at him. "**Wall of Wind Technique.**" He'd hoped to hold her off as a barrier of solid air swept towards her.

Moka however sensed it and simply leapt over it to land near him. Before he could move or cast another jutsu she caught him with a kick to the chest that sent him down. She was on him, pinning him to the ground she began beating him with all her might.

He could have killed her. He didn't need hand signs to create a fire that would have left her nothing but ashes. But the thought never crossed his mind. Anything, even dying, was better than that. He tried to get away from her but she gave him no chance. He could only hope his plan would work before the Kyuubi's energy gave out.

From a safe distance an invisible Mako watched as Moka did all she could to kill her lover. Her way of fighting had always been to use others as her weapons. She was weak in actual combat.

"Found you bitch!" Naruto's voice screamed as he tackled her from behind.

"No! How could you find me?" In her panic she again became visible.

The face of a transformed Naruto smiled down wickedly. "When I'm like this I have a real good sense of smell. I'll give you just one chance to surrender."

"No!" If she surrendered she was as good as dead. A finger jabbed through his chest and the clone was gone with a puff of smoke.

"Wrong answer!" Five more clones appeared around the now visible Mako. As one they sent a hail of kunai encased with wind chakra at her.

She didn't have a chance.

Moka suddenly stopped. She held her fist in place and seemed to shake.

"Moka?" he asked hopefully. He'd just gotten the memory of one of his clones being taken out by Mako. Maybe some of the others had finished her.

She looked down at him, seeming to be confused for a moment.
"Naruto?"

"Moka, are you o.k.?"

"Naruto... please forgive me." She shuddered and pitched forward unconscious.

"Moka! Moka-chan are you all right?!" He let go of the red chakra and despite his own sudden sense of weakness he grabbed her and held her close. "Moka-chan?!" She did not respond.

"It's going to be all right," he whispered to her. He got up and performed the shun shin. The clones could take care of Kuyou. He was taking her immediately to the academy infirmary.

Tell him to his face

She slowly opened her eyes. It took her a moment to orient herself. She was lying in a strange bed and the room was dark. She could see in the dark and looked about. From the small bed she was in she guessed she was in the academy infirmary. The next thing she noticed was someone sitting in a chair next to her bed. His head was lolled back and he was snoring. *I cannot believe I have actually missed the sound of his snoring.* Was the first thought that crossed her mind. The second; *he actually stayed with me, I am so glad.* She reached out and gently shook his arm.

"Naruto," she called out to him.

At the sound of her voice he began to stir awake. He opened up his eyes and saw Moka looking at him with a small smile. "Moka-chan you're awake."

"I am Uzumaki Naruto," she said. Her smile widened a bit. "Are you aware that you just called me Moka-chan?"

"Yeah," he rubbed the back of his head. "I'm still allowed to right?"

"Of course," she looked at him questioningly. "Can you tell me why I am here?"

"Don't you remember what happened?"

She shook her head slightly. "The last thing I recall was watching your transformation."

"Huh, well I guess forgetting everything must be a side effect." He related to her the details of the attack. Moka listened to his words with a calm face.

"So, I tried to kill you?" She said softly.

He grinned at her. "Well it's not the first time."

She did not react to his little joke. "I am so sorry Naruto; it seems that once again I tried to hurt you. Please forgive me."

Reaching out he gently took a hold of her hand. "There's nothing to forgive Moka-chan, I know it wasn't your choice to attack me."

She glanced down to where their hands were and a light blush touched her cheeks. "Thank you."

"You're very welcome Moka-chan." Naruto glanced out the window. "You've been here all night. It'll be morning soon. I'm sure as soon as the doctor comes back in to check on you he'll release you. Do you mind if I stay here until then?"

"That would please me Naruto."

He nodded and they began to talk about the little things going on in their lives. Light conversation meant to pass the time.

All the while, he never let go of her hand.

"Mako is dead," Kiria spoke while reading.

"Did she reveal anything before she was killed?" Hokuto asked.

"If she had wouldn't you be in a cell right now?" Kiria asked.

"Well that is something at least." Hokuto let out a disappointed sigh. "Midou, Mizuki, and now Mako, we have lost our best people because of Naruto. Even worse, the plan is in jeopardy."

"Why don't I have a go at him? It would definitely be entertaining."

"No! Absolutely not!"

Kiria looked up from his book surprised. "Why not?"

"Because you might lose."

"You actually think he would have a chance against me?"

"I honestly don't know," Hokuto admitted. "But I'm starting to think that his reputation is pretty well earned. In any case, we can't wait for the cultural festival to act anymore. We have to push forward our plans."

Kiria looked back down at his book. "Maybe we should just forget about the plan."

"What? What are you talking about? We've been aiming towards this for three years! Everything we've done, from creating ANTI-THESIS to my becoming Committee President was all just to make this happen. How can you even suggest we stop now when we're so close?"

"Well my motivations are a little bit different from yours." Kiria said calmly as he read. "I'm not out for revenge or looking to destroy anything. I just found all this to be really entertaining. You also happen to be my best and only friend so I wanted to help you with your dream. But there's no point in continuing this if it gets you killed."

"I'm not stopping until I get my revenge." Hokuto answered, his voice and tone rigid.

Kiria glanced at him over the top of his book. "Even if it kills you?"

"So long as I get my revenge, I don't care what happens after that." Hokuto said.

Kiria went back to reading. "Fine, you always were stubborn."

Hokuto nodded, he knew his friend well. Kiria would back him no matter what. "We'll forget all about the cultural festival, we'll begin as soon as the Headmaster returns."

"Hokuto!"

The President had been on his way to a Committee meeting when he'd heard his name called. He stopped and turned about to see someone approaching him. "Ah, Naruto, I haven't seen you in any Committee meetings lately. You know as a class representative it's your duty to attend them you know."

He gave Hokuto a big friendly smile. "Sorry, but I've had more important things to deal with. Fighting ANTI-THESIS for example."

"Really," Hokuto began walking again and Naruto fell into step beside him. "May I ask how it is going?"

"Oh it's going well, as a matter of fact I don't think ANTI-THESIS will be a problem for too much longer."

"You have said that before," Hokuto pointed out.

"Yes, but now I'm even more certain than I was before." His smile got brighter and his voice even friendlier. "You see I was attacked yesterday by one of them, some girl, she never did mention her name."

"I trust you are all right."

"Not a scratch on me. But someone who is very precious to me was also attacked and she had to spend the night in the infirmary. Fortunately she was fine."

"Well I am glad to hear that. Was this precious person Moka? There is a rumor going around that she was in the infirmary."

Naruto nodded. "The rumors here sure go around fast don't they? Yeah, it was Moka. The outcast ayashi who did it got sliced up by me."

"You killed her?" Hokuto sounded surprised. "Wouldn't have been better to have taken her prisoner?"

"Yeah, I gave her one chance to give up, after that I didn't give her any more chances. To be honest I didn't really want to spare her, not after she attacked Moka. But anyway, that has nothing to do with why I'm sure ANTI-THESIS is finished."

"Oh? Then why do you believe that?"

Naruto looked directly into the taller boy's eyes. Hokuto thought they might have flashed red for an instant. "Because I think I know who their leader is, and I'm going to kill him." Naruto sounded pleased. "Whoever the girl was she no doubt got her orders from him. So as far as I'm concerned he was the one who caused Moka to be hurt."

"And you are going to kill him for that?"

"That's right, anyone who attacks someone I care for becomes my enemy and gets no mercy." Naruto chuckled. "I just wish there were some way I could tell the person to his face I was going to kill him." He glanced back up at Hokuto. "But that's impossible of course."

"Of course," Hokuto responded easily.

"Well I just wanted to say, 'hi' so I'll be going."

"You're not coming to the meeting?"

"I'd sooner chew my own arm off."

Hokuto looked at him carefully. "You're really a very cruel person aren't you?"

Naruto laughed. "You have no fucking idea."

In a deluxe apartment in Tokyo a man was lying unconscious on the floor. He had just been attacked and his mind ransacked. Come the

morning he would only remember feeling faint and passing out. He would make an appointment to see his family doctor. He was just an ordinary man; a local who had a job of collecting the weekly rent and checking on the vacant apartment to make sure it was still in good condition. He had no idea of the significance of the apartment or its last resident.

"Remember, we must leave everything as we found it," a man in black robe with red clouds said. "If they realize this apartment is known to us our efforts will all have been wasted."

"I know I know," the other man sighed. He was going through a stack of envelopes. "I wish we could have found this place a year ago."

"That would have made things simpler," the first man agreed. He was going through the empty drawers of the desk in the bedroom. "However Konoha made every effort to keep his location hidden. Everything that touches on him is an S plus rank secret. We are fortunate to have learned this much."

Kisame glanced into a mirror. He smiled at the powerful blue skinned ninja looking back at him. When they exited the apartment he would have to restore his henge and look like a typical short businessman. He would even have to appear in a business suit. "When we're done here we're going to a geisha house right?"

Itachi let out an annoyed sigh. "We are here on a mission, we are not here for pleasure."

"Hey, we're doing the mission. All I'm saying is we'll have a little free time right?"

Itachi was about to admonish his partner when he suddenly began coughing.

"Are you all right?" Kisame called from the living room.

Itachi noted the small amount of blood on the hand that had covered his mouth. He quickly took out a handkerchief and wiped both hand and mouth clean. *I am running out of time.* "I am fine." He called back serenely.

"You've been coughing an awful lot lately. Maybe while we're here you should see a doctor."

"I am fine," Itachi repeated. "Besides I have no reason to see a doctor." *There is nothing that can be done at this point.*

Kisame was going through the letters and finding nothing but old bills and advertisements. He then came across an open envelope with no return address or postage. "Hello, what have we here?" He quickly pulled out the single sheet of paper that was inside. "Youkai Academy, a private high school for the gifted." Kisame laughed.

"Have you found something?"

"I think so," Kisame said happily. "This definitely calls for a celebration. We're definitely going to see some geishas!"

At the Student Police Headquarters Kuyou was up and about. He'd recovered quickly and refused to believe Naruto's description of events. His pride would not accept that any lowly rogue monster could have controlled him so easily. Spotting Naruto he looked up and nodded. "I am told that Moka has been released and is fine."

"She is," Naruto confirmed. "But I won't forget the fact she was hurt."

Kuyou grinned. "Sounds like you're eager to act."

"Yeah, you might say that."

"Well in that case I have some good news for you, the Headmaster will be returning tomorrow night."

"Perfect! Now I'll finally be able to talk to him and deal with that smug bastard." He gave Kuyou an excited grin of his own. "I can't wait."

A vampire's blood

"So are you o.k. Moka?" Yukari asked.

"I am fine," she answered. "I merely needed some time to recover."

"Are you sure you want to come with me to meet the Headmaster tonight?" Naruto asked.

"Certainly," Moka said. "If for whatever reason he refuses permission to deal with who you suspect I will convince him."

"You know if you're planning on threatening him that might not be wise." Naruto pointed out.

"A small amount of intimidation should be sufficient."

"So who is it you're planning to arrest?" Yukari asked.

"You know I can't tell you that." Naruto said as he ate his lunch.

Yukari looked unhappily between Naruto and Moka. "You two keep a lot of secrets from me don't you?"

"I'm sorry Yukari but it has to be this way." Naruto said. "I'll tell you all about it after it's over."

That evening the two of them approached the Headmaster's residence to find the door already open. They shared an uneasy look.

"This can't be good," Naruto muttered. They quickly entered to find four men in black lying unconscious in the grand hallway. But much worse was the sight of the Headmaster himself lying at the top of the stairwell in a pool of blood.

"What the hell happened here?" Naruto ran up the stairs to check on the Headmaster. Not only was he still alive despite a gaping wound in his back, he was somehow still conscious as well. "Relax Headmaster; I'll get you to the infirmary right away."

"No," the man gasped weakly. "Forget me, you must stop him."

"My Naruto, you really are very persistent." Hokuto stepped out from behind a nearby column as Kiria stepped out from behind another. Naruto noted that Hokuto seemed to have a rosary in his right hand. "You really have no idea when to let something go do you?"

As the confrontation began a figure at the door way slipped quickly and quietly away.

"I'm not one for giving up, especially not when my precious people are involved."

Hokuto shook his head a bit. "You're a rude and vicious little man, but I must admit I admire your determination."

"Is this what you were after all this time?" Naruto asked. His body was surrounded by his three tailed demonic cloak. "Were you out to murder the Headmaster?"

Hokuto laughed slightly. "Kill the Headmaster? I admit the thought had crossed my mind, but what I want is so much larger." He held out the rosary clutched in his fist. "I had to defeat the Headmaster to acquire this, 'rosary of judgment.' This is the key to everything I have worked for."

"You have to stop him," the headmaster spoke in a rasping whisper. "With that he can undo everything." The headmaster shut his glowing eyes and became unconscious.

"What did he mean undo everything?" Naruto demanded.

Hokuto smiled. "I am going to deactivate the barrier that keeps this academy hidden from the human world. I am going to end this ridiculous and artificial peace between human and monster. They were enemies in ancient times and were born to hate and despise one another. I just want to return the world to the chaos that is its natural order. Humans will hunt monsters and monsters will devour humans; as it was always meant to be. And the very first victims of this new order will be this wretched academy and all its students. Youkai Academy will be the flash point that begins this glorious war."

"Fool!" Moka snapped angrily. "Humans and monsters are *not* natural enemies. Despite our many differences we can coexist." She glanced over at Naruto. "And even care for each other. All you will do is cause need less death and destruction."

"Yeah, but you have to admit," Kiria flipped his book shut. "It does sound interesting doesn't it?"

Hokuto looked over at his friend. "Keep them here for just a few minutes then get to the rendezvous point." Hokuto spoke a few words of magic and the floor around became filled with inscriptions and runes made of white light. He began to sink into the floor.

Seeing his enemy escaping Naruto rushed at him and so did Moka. Kiria was fast enough to block Moka but not Naruto, who dove into the floor and was swallowed up by the white light.

To Moka's horror the light vanished along with both Naruto and Hokuto.

"What happened to Naruto?" She demanded as she viciously attacked Kiria.

Kiria's right arm transformed into a huge scythe. He tried to cut her head off but Moka was just able to avoid the blow. Kiria was exceptionally fast and seemed able to match Moka move for move.

"It looks to me like he got caught up in the teleportation spell." Kiria answered good naturedly.

"Where did they go?!" Her fist smashed a marble column to pieces as Kiria only just ducked out of the way.

"I knew fighting a vampire would be interesting!" He sounded very happy. "I'll make you a deal, if you can beat me I'll tell you. And you better hurry; Hokuto will have to kill him before he can put his plan into action."

Furious Moka stepped up her attacks but Kiria managed to stay just out of her reach.

"Why?" Hokuto demanded. He transformed his entire body except for his head into a series of razor sharp bones, changing his body into a hollowed out ten foot tall monstrosity. He slammed the bones of his right arm down; they smashed the stone floor but completely missed Naruto. "Why are you interfering with me?! You're not a monster, you're human. Why should you care if this place is destroyed?!"

"Some of my best friends happen to be monsters, and I won't let them be hurt by this pointless war." He ran through some hand signs. " **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" Naruto had no idea where they were. Only that they were in a cavernous and darkened room. Wind jutsus were of limited value in an enclosed space, but fire would work just fine. The hundred clones he made launched themselves at his opponent. He was not surprised to see that even in his bizarre new form Hokuto was able to move with blinding speed and to extend the bones all along his body. He hit the clones with ease and wiped them out quickly.

"Whatever you do I won't let you stop me." He again extended some his bones to only have Naruto easily leap away and avoid them.

"Tell me something, why are you so determined to do this? What will you get out of starting a war between human and monster?"

"I'll get my revenge on this place." Hokuto said angrily. "You see I was a human, an ordinary human with no supernatural powers. I came here by chance and because I wanted to get away from my abusive family. I was stupid enough to believe that this school, so far away from everything, would give me a chance to start over." He let out a bitter laugh. "But because I was so weak I found myself suffering worse abuse than I ever had. I had to fight just to survive from day to day in this place. Then one day I finally realized that there was no place for me in this world or in the human one. So I decided to try and destroy them both."

Naruto actually nodded sympathetically. "People abused you for no reason except that they could, and you wanted revenge. I can relate to that. Hell, if we'd met under different circumstances I might have helped you. But that was before I found people I cared about, people I would die to protect. For their sake I'm going to stop you." He unleashed a mass of fire from both hands.

Hokuto dodged. Some of the fire clipped one of his legs but he seemed not to notice. "I won't let you stop me! I'll have my revenge no matter what!" He raced in from the side and turned his left arm into a series of spears. They caught Naruto near his ribs and slammed him into the far wall. Though caught off guard for just a moment he stood and ran up the side of the wall. He began running at Hokuto along the ceiling.

"And I won't let you hurt the people who matter to me!" He raced through more hand signs. " **Grand Fireball Technique.**" Opening his mouth wide he spat out a dozen huge boulders of fire.

With the limited room Hokuto could not dodge them all. One of the boulders caught his extended right leg at the, 'knee.' The bone buckled and melted beneath the extreme heat of the fireball. Hokuto cried out in pain as he stumbled and collapsed. All his speed and agility were now worthless as he had only one leg now.

"I've got you now!" Naruto leapt down and tackled him. He wound up standing on Hokuto's bony chest looking down into his still human face. "It's over."

Though defeated Hokuto looked up at Naruto and began laughing. In his bony right hand he held out the rosary he'd taken from the Headmaster. "Do you know what the power of this rosary is?"

"You already said it would let you lower the barrier around the academy."

"True," Hokuto agreed. "But you see, its basic power is to create or dissolve *any* seal or barrier." He pressed the rosary to Naruto's cloak. Naruto felt the power that was filling him just go; it drained away in an instant. The cloak and all of the Kyuubi's power simply left him. Before Naruto could even react Hokuto's left hand transformed into a single massive blade. Hokuto drove it into and through the middle of Naruto's chest.

"You'll never be able to defeat me!" Kiria mocked her as he again stayed one step ahead of her.

"Damn it you coward! Stand and fight me if you dare!"

"Why would I do that?" Kiria asked amused. "I only have to keep you occupied. Meanwhile your precious Naruto is fighting for his life somewhere." He was enjoying his battle against a fearsome vampire and thought he would be able to defeat her. That was when he suddenly slipped and went sliding across the floor. *Ice?! Why is the floor covered in ice?*

"What have you done with Naruto?!" A woman's furious voice demanded.

Kiria found himself ducking to avoid a set of razor sharp claws. Kurumu flew past him and then rose into the air. She was looking

murderous and ready to come at him again. Before he could move his legs to escape they were surrounded by blocks of ice.

"Where is Naruto?" Mizore demanded.

"If you've hurt him you'll answer to all of us," Yukari said angrily.

Before he could do anything to free himself Moka was on him. "Cowardly wretch! How dare you try and keep me from the one I love! Know your place!" With a single ferocious kick she slammed him into and through a wall.

Moka hurried over to grab a hold of the now defeated Kiria. Even as she did so she sent an angry glare at Kurumu who was landing near her. "What are you doing here succubus?"

"I asked her and Yukari to come help," Mizore said. "I was stalking Naruto and when I saw what was about to happen I thought I should get them."

Moka nodded grudgingly at Mizore. "I thank you and I thank Yukari," she glared at back at Kurumu. "Your help is not required."

Kurumu puffed out her chest and stared straight back at her. "I'm here to help Naruto whether you want me to or not."

"Is this really the time to be arguing?" Mizore asked.

Moka snarled a bit, but decided to let it go... for now. With a single hand she shook Kiria back and forth. "Where did Hokuto take Naruto? Tell me right now or I will start snapping off limbs."

Kiria opened his eyes and smiled at her. "Well I guess you beat me, even though you needed some help."

"Where is Naruto?" She put her face dangerously close to his. "I will not ask you again."

Kiria chuckled. "I'll tell you, I said I would if you defeated me. He is in the basement of the academy."

Moka immediately threw him aside. "I am going to him; you three keep an eye on Kiria and get the Headmaster and his guards to the infirmary." She gave none of them a chance to argue. She was surrounded by black fire and then gone.

Naruto felt the pain stab through him as the blood filled his mouth.

"For what it is worth I am sorry we had to be enemies." Hokuto said.

Me too. Naruto thought but could not say. The Kyuubi's power was completely gone, but not his own. With one swift clean motion he pulled out a kunai. He surrounded it with his wind chakra. Then with an easy flick of his wrist he threw it.

He took a certain satisfaction at Hokuto's look of surprise just before the kunai struck his forehead. Given they were only a few feet apart there was no way for him to dodge. The kunai went through his forehead with a, 'chop' and out the back with a, 'pop.' Human brain matter splattered on the floor beneath him. As Hokuto's body twitched his arm jerked out and Naruto pitched over to the floor next to him.

He was in the middle of a slowly expanding pool of blood. Naruto coughed out the blood in his mouth and managed to struggle for breath. His body was already growing numb and he felt cold. *So this is how I die? All alone in the dark?* Despite the pain he managed a small chuckle. *Damn villagers will probably throw a party when they find out.* He let out another rasping breath as the cold spread. *I wish I could see Moka one last time.*

And as though kami had finally heard one of his prayers she appeared.

"Naruto!"

He turned his head towards the sound of running feet. "Moka-chan," he whispered.

As soon as she got to him she knelt down beside him in his blood and pressed both her hands over his wound. "Naruto! You're bleeding! What happened to your healing ability? Why won't the blood stop?!"

It was strange hearing the adult Moka sound so panicked. He reached up and took a hold of one of her hands. "Moka-chan," he called to her weakly. "Thank you, thank you for making me so happy and letting me know what love was. Thank you for never leaving me alone, even now."

She stared down at him. "Do not say such foolish things Naruto."

He smiled up at her. Somehow dying didn't seem so awful since he wasn't alone. "Moka," he needed to say it. "I still love you. I could... never stop. Please... forgive me." It was hard to breathe now and things were getting dark.

She could feel his pulse growing faint and knew there was only one way. She got a hold of him and pulled him up to her. "I will not let you go my beloved. Take my blood and live." She bit into his neck and injected her blood into him. *Please live Naruto, I cannot bear to lose you.*

His wound was deep and fatal and she knew he was very close to death. She was not sure that even vampire blood could pull him back. But she poured it into him, determined to give anything if it would save him. She soon began to feel weak and grew faint; she had given him all that she could. She released her hold and carefully set him back down.

"Please... live..." she slid down on top of him and closed her eyes.

She entered the darkness not knowing if she would ever see him again.

Promise of a lifetime

She slowly opened her eyes. It took her a moment to orient herself. A rare exhaustion and sense of weakness permeated her body. *Why do I feel so weak?* In a flash the memory came back to her, him lying in a pool of his own blood, her fang marks still fresh on his neck.

"Naruto!" She suddenly sat up in her small bed and looked about.

She was in the infirmary again. And as before she had woken up in the darkness. There was a folding chair next to her bed.

It was empty.

He wasn't there, she was alone. Tossing aside the blankets she got up. As soon as she did her legs shook and threatened to buckle. Her entire body seemed fragile and cried out for rest. She ignored the way her knees seemed to wobble and moved shakily towards the door. She needed to find out what had happened. She stumbled forward, only to feel her legs begin to give out as she reached the door.

The door opened, and light from the hallway flooded into her face. A familiar figure was standing there staring at her.

"Moka-chan!" Naruto's arms grabbed hold of her before her legs could collapse. He pulled her close and held her tight against him. "You're awake! Are you all right? How do you feel?"

She shut her eyes and pressed her face against the side of his. "I feel weak, but now that I know you are alive everything is fine." She breathed in his scent. It was him, it was definitely him, but there was something just a little different. There was something just a little off. She didn't care though, he was alive and he was here, that was enough for her. "Are you all right Naruto? Have you healed?"

"I'm fine Moka-chan," he whispered softly in her ear. "Thanks to you."

"I am glad." Without thinking she nuzzled his neck. Even with the slight difference he still smelled wonderful and she suddenly realized she was starved. "Your scent, it is..." *No, I must not.* Though she longed for the taste of his sweet blood her memory of his near fatal wound was still fresh. She did not want to injure him.

Naruto seemed to sense the internal struggle and gently pressed the back of her head and bared his neck to her. "It's all right Moka-chan," he gently encouraged. "Go ahead and drink."

"But..." she wanted to argue but her desire to taste his blood was overwhelming.

"It's all right, I really have healed completely. It's been seven days, the sacrifice you made for me has left you exhausted." He smiled at her reassuringly. "If my blood will help you then please take it."

She thought to argue, but with his words she gave in to her own hunger and bit down on him. She felt new strength flow into her with the familiar warmth of his blood. It was sweet, delicious, and she drank happily. But as with his scent there was something just a little bit different. She could taste just the slightest bit of bitterness hidden beneath the sweet. It was not enough to take away her pleasure or ruin the taste, but it was there.

She drank her fill and let go of him. She then looked into his eyes. "Thank you Naruto."

"No, thank you Moka-chan. I wouldn't even be here now if you hadn't saved me." He leaned in just a bit and kissed her. She closed her eyes and felt her heart begin to pound. *Everything is all right now.* Wrapping her arms around his neck she pressed his mouth down onto her greedy lips. Her hips began to slowly grind against him. She needed him. She needed to feel his body inside of hers. She hungered for his touch as she had for his blood.

"Take me," she panted. Her hands began to unbutton his shirt.

"Here?!"

"Here, now, on the floor or on the bed I do not care which." She thrilled at the feel of his muscled chest beneath her fingertips.

"We're going to get caught." Even as he said that he began moving her towards the small bed. He wanted her every bit as much as she did him. That was the end of any kind of resistance as they both gave into their needs to express the love they shared.

Three Days Ago

He was sitting by her side watching her sleep. The doctor had assured him that she would make a full recovery. She merely needed to sleep until she restored her strength. He had been asked to leave and told he would be contacted the moment she woke up. His reply had been to go into three tail mode and tell the doctor and the nursing staff that he was staying until she woke up.

He had actually recovered very quickly. Moka's blood had repaired his wound and stabilized him. Hokuto's attack with the rosary had worn off after only a few hours and he had regained access to the Kyuubi's power. Once that happened he enjoyed a swift and full recovery. He wanted to use his power to heal her but was ignorant of medical jutsus. The *other* possibility he didn't dare try as he was not sure what the effect might be on a vampire.

The door to Moka's room opened and the Headmaster walked in. From his gait it seemed he was fully recovered.

"How are you doing this morning Naruto?"

"Fine," he said wearily. "Is there something I can do for you?"

The Headmaster shook his head. "Actually I am here to fulfill our bargain. ANTI-THESIS is smashed and thanks to your actions a great many lives were undoubtedly saved." He held out a silver

rosary with a blue gem in its center. "As we agreed, so long as you wear this over your chest the seal placed there will be ineffective. If any should try and activate it you will feel a very slight pressure. That way, if you wish, you can act as though it were still in effect. Jiraiya or anyone else inspecting it will assume it to be still functioning."

"Thanks, that might actually be useful." He took the rosary from him.

"If you wish, I could also fully suppress the other seal as well."

Naruto looked at him in surprise. "You can do that?"

"Easily, Hokuto was an amateur but he was able to fully seal the demon within you, if only temporarily. I could make the effect permanent. You would no longer have access to the demon's power, but the demon would no longer have any influence on your mind or personality."

It was an offer he'd never expected. "I wish I could have met you eight years ago," he slowly shook his head. "I have powerful enemies looking for me and my furry pal. I doubt I could survive without the Kyuubi's power. Besides, I'll need it to fulfill my dream."

The Headmaster seemed to look at him with understanding and a little sadness. "You know I had great hopes for Hokuto once. He was a brilliant student and had tremendous potential. Until his hatred poisoned him. Tell me Naruto, is your dream anything like his was?"

Naruto looked at the man coldly. "With respect, my dream does not involve this academy or the world of monsters, so it's really none of your business."

"I see," the Headmaster sighed. "It saddens me to hear that Naruto, but you are right, it is none of my concern."

"Listen, since I've helped you, could I ask for a favor?"

"What do you want?"

"Could you keep my future progress a secret? It would help me out if you would stop reporting to the Hokage."

To Naruto's disappointment the Headmaster shook his head. "I gave my word to your Hokage and I must honor it, as I honored our agreement."

"I see, I guess it was too much to hope for that you would want to help me."

"I am in your debt for what you have done for this academy and all its students, but I will not go back on my word."

When the doctor arrived for his morning rounds he was relieved and pleased to see Moka awake and alert. He was also slightly suspicious to see Naruto adjusting his clothing with a slightly panicked look on his face. Moka meanwhile had looked oddly amused.

"Well you seem to have fully recovered, you are free to go."

"Great!" Naruto wasted no time lifting her up out of her bed. "I'll take her home then."

"But..." before the doctor could say anything else the two of them were gone in a swirl of wind and leaves. The doctor was left to simply shake his head. "Young love," he said in an amused voice.

When they materialized in her bedroom Naruto had been just about to lay her down on the bed when Moka held out a hand stopping him.

"Just a moment Naruto, please set me on my feet."

"Huh? But don't you want to get back to it?" he said pleading.

She wore a slight grin. "There is something we must resolve first, please put me down."

Though disappointed he did just as she asked. "What's going on?"

"There is something that must be dealt with now," from out of her pocket she took out her rosary. "For all of this time the other Moka has been consumed with sorrow. Now that you have admitted your love for us again it is time for you to speak to her."

"I understand," he nodded. "You're right; I do need to talk to her."

"Please be gentle," Moka placed the rosary back on its chain. Her power leached away and her form became that of the younger Moka. Unconscious Naruto caught her and carefully held her until she opened her green eyes to look up at him.

"Hey," he smiled at her.

Her reaction caught him off guard. She pulled out of his grasp and turned her back to him. "Naruto-kun... I... am glad you are all right."

He was a little surprised and disappointed. He knew she was aware of everything the other Moka knew. After what had happened he'd expected her to grab hold of him and shower him with affection. "Aren't you happy to see me?"

She turned around and looked at him in surprise. "Of course I am! How can you even ask that?!"

"Well, you aren't exactly acting like it."

She looked down and felt ashamed. "Do you still hate looking at me?" She asked in a small voice. "The last time I was with you, you said you couldn't talk to me, you... you said when you looked at me you saw me na... naked with Gin." His answer was to put his arms around her and pull her to him.

"Please forgive me Moka-chan," he said to her in a caring voice. "Please forgive me for being so cruel to you. Even though I knew it wasn't your choice I still blamed you. Even though I was hurting I should never have said something so awful." He squeezed her tight. "I was hurt, and maybe I did hate you," he could feel her try to pull away but he held on to her. "But I was a fool. I realize now that once I found out the truth I shouldn't have taken my own pain out on you. Everything that happened before is forgiven; I love you with all of my heart Moka-chan. And I beg you to forgive me for hurting you."

She looked up into his face, her eyes radiating hope. "Do you really mean that Naruto-kun?"

"I do, every word of it."

She kissed him, and with her kiss she granted him absolution from all his sins. "I forgive you," she pressed herself against him. "All I want is to be with you. Let's never ever be apart again. Whatever happens I want to be at your side."

"In that case, will you marry me?"

She looked at him in shock. "YES! Yes, yes, yes I'll marry you!" A rapturous kiss sealed the promise between them.

"I love you Moka-chan, and I swear to you we will never be apart again. That is my promise of a lifetime."

He began kissing her and soon they were in her bed making love. Their hearts and souls joined together as one.

Neither of them would ever be alone again.

Festival Night

"Do you want to see a magic trick?"

Lying in bed beside him she looked over and smiled. "Have you learned a new jutsu you want to show me?"

"No, it's not a jutsu. It's something amazing I only discovered a couple days ago."

Now slightly curious she nodded to him. "Go ahead."

He grinned. "Actually I think I'll show you later, build up the suspense. I promise you'll be amazed." He glanced at the clock on her nightstand. "You want to get something to eat?"

She reached out and lovingly stroked the side of his neck. "No thanks, but maybe later."

"Actually I was thinking we should go meet the girls for lunch."

"Don't wanna," she giggled and playfully ran her hands over his chest. "It's soooo comfy and warm right here."

"While you were asleep all of the girls visited you, even Kurumu."

At the mention of the succubus Moka frowned at him. "You sure she was visiting me? Maybe it was just an excuse for her to see you."

"No," he said firmly. "She was worried about you just like Yukari and Mizore were." He took a deep breath. "I was sort of hoping all five of us could have lunch together."

Moka looked unhappy, but at least did not immediately reject the idea. "Why do you want her to sit with us?"

"Because she fought and put herself on the line to help us. She didn't have to do that, but she did. And I really think she is honestly sorry about what she did to you."

"So you want me to forgive her?"

"I'd like it if we could all be friends again."

Moka looked at him for awhile before finally answering him in a low voice. "I won't forgive her, and I won't ever be friends with her, but because *you* ask it I'll agree to tolerate her. So she can sit with us if you want."

"Thank you Moka-chan," he said appreciatively. "Maybe we can even all do something during the cultural festival tomorrow."

"The festival is tomorrow?"

Naruto nodded. "You've been asleep for a week, and before that the other Moka had stopped going to class so I guess it sort of snuck up on you. But yeah, tomorrow is the start of the three day festival."

She reached out and took a hold of his hand. "You'll accompany me right Naruto? I've always had to be alone on festival nights, and I've always wanted a companion to share everything with. So you'll be with me during the whole festival right?" She sounded worried.

Smiling he leaned over to reassure her with a light kiss. "Of course I will, you will never be alone again Moka-chan."

"Moka! I missed you!" A happy Yukari glomped on to her chest, getting a firm hold on her breasts. "You're so much nicer than the other Moka was!"

"Iyaaa!" Moka cried out and began flailing her arms about as Yukari laughed and continued to hold on.

Naruto shook his head and consoled himself with the thought that Yukari's arms would get tired... eventually. He looked about the courtyard. "Mizore?"

"Yes?" She popped her head out from behind a metal pole.

"Would you like to sit with us for lunch?"

"No, I'm fine where I am."

Before she could pop back behind the pole he got a hold of her hand. "Please Mizore-chan? You're a friend and a very precious person to me. I'd like you to sit with us. Moka and I also have some big news."

Mizore glanced to where Moka was still trying to shake Yukari loose. "Since the pink haired Moka is back I guess that means that you two have fixed things and are a couple again?"

"Well that's part of it, but there's more. Will you sit with us?"

She shyly looked down to where his hand was holding hers. "O.k." she said bashfully. She let him lead her by the hand over to the table.

Eventually Yukari released her death grip and she and Moka joined them at the table.

"Yahoo! Who is the sexiest girl in the academy?"

"You are!" Kurumu's fan boys enthusiastically cried out. She was leading her followers past their table, careful not to look at them.

"Kurumu?" Naruto spoke in a normal voice.

She immediately halted and turned to him, giving him all of her attention. "Yes Naruto-kun?"

"Do you want to join us?"

Kurumu's eyes flashed from Naruto over to Moka who was right next to him.

Moka gave the blue haired girl the curtest of nods. "It's fine."

Kurumu smiled happily and quickly came over to their table. "I'd love to!"

Seeing this sudden and dramatic change of heart her many devotees cried out in anguish and some even made threats.

Kurumu rounded on them and they took a collective step back. "I'm sorry but I can't eat with you any more. And please don't cause Naruto any trouble; if he has to kill all of you it might be a problem for him." The sullen crowd slowly dispersed as she sat down at the table.

They had all visited Moka in the infirmary and spoken to Naruto. They all knew what had happened, and since the younger Moka was present they all guessed it meant they were a couple again. But even knowing all this the three girls were all taken by surprise when Naruto announced that he and Moka were engaged to be married.

The three girls took the news in very different ways. Yukari was jumping for joy and asking them if she could be a bridesmaid. Mizore sat there quietly and absorbed the information that Naruto was definitely out of her reach. She congratulated the couple and quietly continued to eat. Kurumu stared at them and tried to hold back her tears. She'd been happy when Naruto had asked her to join them. It was proof that he had finally forgiven her. And even though it was obvious that he was with Moka again she still had some hope for the future. But now she knew that there was no future with him. He belonged to Moka.

"Congratulations," Kurumu said and tried to mean it. Even if she had lost him she wanted Naruto to be happy.

"Thank you Kurumu-chan, and I want you to know that I want us to remain friends." Naruto told her with the utmost kindness. "I'm sure you'll find someone who will be a much better match for you."

She smiled at him and did not reply.

"Say Naruto," Mizore said in an ordinary tone. "Do you think I could ask a favor of you tomorrow?"

"Sure, what?"

"My mother is visiting and she sort of has the impression I have a boyfriend. Do you think you could spend the day with me pretending to be my boyfriend?"

He stared at her. "You want me to tell your mom that I'm your boyfriend?"

"That's right, would you mind? My mom worries about me a lot and believing I have someone would help set her mind at ease. It would mean a lot to me if you could just pretend for one day. Please?"

"Well..."

"No! Absolutely not!" Moka snapped. She looked at Mizore angrily. "He just told you that he's my fiancé! How can you ask him to be your boyfriend?"

"I'm only asking him to *pretend* to be my boyfriend for just one day. My mother will only be here tomorrow. And it would mean so much to me to be able to show her I have someone to care for me. Not all of us are as lucky as you are Moka. It's only for one day, is it really asking so much?"

Moka looked very unhappy. "But Naruto-kun has already promised to spend the whole festival with me!"

He looked over to Moka and smiled. "It's o.k. Moka-chan I can do both."

"How?" Moka asked. "Are you going to spend the day running around between us?"

He smiled and ran through some hand signs. " **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" A perfect copy appeared standing right behind Mizore. "It's really not a problem. The real me will stay with you while my clones can stay with Mizore and her mom."

"See?" Mizore pointed out. "So you don't mind do you?"

Moka was still frowning. "Well, I guess so long as the *real* Naruto is with me it would be all right."

"Good," Mizore said. "And by the way he may have to kiss me."

"What?!" Moka said. "Who said anything about him kissing you?!" Moka demanded.

"I thought it was implied," Mizore said. "I mean boyfriends do kiss their girlfriends, and my mom might want to see it or she won't really believe he's my boyfriend."

Kurumu coughed and brought everyone's attention over to her. "Uhm, I sort of need the same favor. My mom is coming here tomorrow too, and I sort of told her I had someone."

" *You* don't need Naruto-kun for this. You can pick any other boy at this school." Moka said coolly.

"Heh, about that, I uh, sort of told my mom that Naruto was mine and I really described him to her in detail."

"Why would you do that?" Moka demanded. "He was never yours to begin with and until just recently he didn't want anything to do with you."

Kurumu looked embarrassed. "Uh, I sort of left those details out."

"Oh! I want my very own Naruto too!" Yukari said. "My parents are coming to visit and I'd love for them to get to know the man who is going to be one of my future lovers."

Moka shut her eyes and rubbed her temples. She had sort of assumed that since Naruto was her fiancé that meant she wouldn't have to share him.

That night Naruto was in her room staring down at a bowl of partially burnt ramen. Across from him Moka was looking unhappy and annoyed. "How did I agree to this?"

"It's not that big a deal really, I'll just be doing some favors for our friends. I mean they did all fight for us, so I think we owe them." Naruto tried to pretend he was enjoying his meal. "I'll only be pretending after all, it's not like it will mean anything."

"Does Kurumu know that?"

He smiled at her. "If she doesn't I'll remind her. You're the only one I love Moka-chan and you're the one I'm going to always be with. I care about the other girls, and they are important to me, but I don't love them."

She nodded. "I know Naruto-kun, and you know I trust you. But still," she shook her head. " *How* did I let Mizore talk me into saying it was o.k. to kiss?"

After spending the night with her he shun shinned away early the next morning so that he could get ready and meet everyone as they had planned. For these three days the entire academy was transformed into a festival ground. All classes were cancelled as the different classes manned their various stands both inside and outside the building. There were cafes serving basic food and drink, games of chance, rides, and bands playing music for dancing. The festivities would begin at ten in the morning and continue until ten at

night. Buses were returning alumni back to the academy from various locals in the human and monster worlds. The rules of the academy were still in effect and so both the students and alumni appeared in their human forms to enjoy the festivities.

Since Naruto and Moka were members of the Police Committee they were not required to work at any of the stands. Mizore, Kurumu, and Yukari were all scheduled to work the second day of the festival, so for today everyone was free to enjoy themselves.

Naruto went outside a little before ten. The stands were already manned and open and the buses were starting to arrive to deposit the alumni who would be customers. The four girls were already waiting for him. Yukari, Mizore, and Kurumu were all dressed in their usual outfits. Moka had on a dark blue yukata with the image of stars designed into it.

He looked at her and smiled. "That looks really good on you."

She felt her face heat at his simple compliment. "Thank you Naruto-kun." She came to his side and put her arm through his. "I am really looking forward to this."

Kurumu looked at the two of them together and felt an ache in her heart. "Yahoo," she said in an excited voice. "So let's have you make us our dates."

"Sure," he performed the hand signs. " **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" Three identical clones came into being beside each girl.

"Yahoo!" Kurumu grabbed onto her Naruto's arm pressing her chest against it. "Come on! Let's go meet my mom!"

Mizore shyly put her arm through his and then rested her head on his shoulder. Even though she knew it was only pretend, she was going to enjoy it. She led him towards the academy at a slow pace, happy just to be at his side.

Yukari grabbed his hand and pulled him along. "Desu! You're buying me candy!"

The original Naruto and Moka remained in front of the boy's dorm and watched them go.

"Even though they're clones, and even though I said it was o.k., I still don't like seeing you with other women." Moka stated, looking a bit depressed. Seeing that Naruto leaned over and whispered something in her ear. Her face went red. "Naruto!"

Seeing her embarrassed reaction he laughed. " *That* is something I will only ever do with you so don't be jealous." He gave her a quick kiss. "You are my one and only Moka-chan."

Feeling better she smiled and got them going down the road. "Come on Naruto-kun, I want to do some goldfish scooping."

"Goldfish scooping?" It was one of those silly games you only found at a festival.

"Well I never tried it before," she finally had someone to be with. She was eager to really enjoy the festival, and to spend every minute of it with her precious boy.

"There she is!" Kurumu cried out happily. "Momma!"

The Naruto who was with her knew immediately who it was Kurumu meant. A small crowd of admirers parted to reveal a stunningly beautiful woman with long blue hair, a cute short dress, a coat, and a purse. Her dress revealed not only some amazing legs but breasts that were even more ample and magnificent than Kurumu's.

Kurumu eagerly brought Naruto up to meet her. "Momma, this is Naruto! Naruto this is my mom Kurono Ageha!"

Her mother eyed him specutively for just a moment and then gave him a pleased smile. "Hmmm, it's very nice to finally meet you Naruto. I have been wanting to meet my daughter's fiancé since she told me about you."

Fiancé?! He looked over at Kurumu. She brought her hands together as though in prayer and mouthed the word, 'please.' He sighed. *It's just for this one day.* He gave Kurumu's mother a deep and respectful bow. "I am very pleased to meet you as well Ageha-san."

Kurumu's mother laughed. "How cute! There's no need to be so formal." She grabbed his head and buried his face into her buxom chest. "Just call me kaasan, after all you and my little girl will be getting married before too long."

Unbelievable! She's even softer than Kurumu! But I can't believe she wants me to call her, 'mom.' After she released him Ageha smiled down and whispered to him. "You know I'm very happy that my little girl has found someone so experienced and with such stamina in the bedroom. From what she tells me you're quite the lover."

Naruto's face turned as red as a tomato as he thought he was going to choke.

"Any way lets all go explore the festival." She wrapped herself around one of his arms, burying it in her soft bosom.

"Yahoo! This will be a lot fun!" Kurumu eagerly grabbed on to his other arm, expertly pressing her chest against it.

So with two gorgeous and full chested women hanging on to him he headed into the academy.

"What are we doing here?"

"We're here to meet my mom." Mizore replied calmly.

They were standing all alone in the middle of some of the woods near where the buses were dropping people off. "Are you sure this is the right spot? There's no one anywhere near this place."

"Hello mother." Mizore said.

And sure enough a woman popped out from behind a tree not ten yards away. "Hello daughter." She was a lovely and elegant woman with the same purple hair and delicate pale skin Mizore had. Her hair was up and she was dressed in a stylish dark grey kimono. She shyly approached them and gave Naruto a graceful bow. "Nice to meet you. I am Mizore's mother Tsurara. You must be Naruto; my daughter speaks of you often."

Naruto was relieved to see that Mizore's mother was such a gentle and cultured woman. He also found it kind of charming that she had a lollipop in her mouth just like Mizore always did. He gave her a low bow. "I am very pleased to meet you Tsurara-san."

She nodded slightly. "Please, just call me Tsurara."

He was about to say something when Mizore jumped in front of him. Before he could ask she got up on her toes and planted a soft kiss on his lips. To say he was caught off guard wouldn't have covered it. He'd have expected something this brazen from Kurumu, but not from shy little Mizore. "What was that?" He whispered to her.

"Sorry," she put her lollipop back in her mouth. "Just wanted my mom to see how in love I am with you." She spoke in a normal voice. She looked at her mom as she again took a hold of his arm and put her head on his shoulder. "Please forgive me mother for my display. Naruto is very shy in public and since we are alone right now..."

Tsurara smiled demurely and nodded. "That's all right; a young couple should be affectionate. So when do you two intend to marry?"

"Marry? It's still way too early for that don't you think?"

A slight frown tugged down the edges of Tsurara's lips. "But you two are dating. Are you the sort of man who would be with a girl and not at least consider marriage?" Without warning the air around her solidified into jagged shards of ice. They grew and came to a sudden halt only inches from his throat.

Instinctively Naruto created fire in his hands and melted the ice. Not meaning to, he sent Tsurara a hard look. "Please don't do that again," he warned her. "I don't like people threatening me."

She was clearly surprised. "My apologies, I have a bad habit of making sharp objects out of ice whenever I get emotional. I did not mean it as a threat."

"In that case it's all right." He said.

Tsurara looked over at her daughter. "You never mentioned he was a fire user."

"Naruto is a man of many different talents." Mizore replied.

"I see," Tsurara smiled again. "A fire user in love with a snow girl, well that's very romantic. Shall we go take a look at the festival?"

Yukari had a huge candy sucker in one hand and was leading Naruto with the other. She led him up to a woman dressed in a black cloak with a pointy hat like Yukari's and to a man with glasses and a tweed sweater. Naruto thought the guy looked like a professor. The woman had a wand and the man held what looked like a spell book.

"Mom, dad, this is Naruto! He's the one I gave that book to. He's also the one who gave me my very first adult kiss and I plan to share his bed as soon as I get a little older."

They were walking along in the middle of a crowd when Naruto stopped and seemed to wince.

"Is something wrong Naruto-kun?"

"I just got the memories from one of my clones. Yukari's mom smacked him over the head with her wand. **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" A new clone appeared.

The clone turned to the original. "Do I have to?"

Naruto was sympathetic but told him he did. "I promised Yukari."

With a look of resignation and doom the clone headed off.

"How are the other clones doing?" Moka asked.

"I have no idea; I don't get their memories until their dispelled."

Naruto and Moka continued to slowly explore all the different stalls. About fifteen minutes later Moka let out an, 'eek' and jumped about a bit.

"What?" Naruto asked.

"Someone grabbed my backside just now!"

Naruto looked around but there was no way to tell who in the vast crowd was the culprit. *If I find out who did it I'll beat the crap out of him.* "Come on Moka-chan, let's not let this ruin things. Let's go do some goldfish scooping."

In the crowd a tall bald man with tattoos watched the two of them head off. The girl was truly beautiful, he had come a long way to visit this festival and he was going to enjoy himself. And that meant he wanted a girl at least as beautiful as her. Her little boyfriend was unimportant; he'd get lost or get hurt. He began to trail after them, enjoying the hunt and waiting for his moment.

"Oh boy," Naruto muttered.

Moka looked up from the goldfish scooping game. She was having a lot of fun and had forgotten the earlier unpleasantness. "What is it?"

"Yukari told her parents about me spending most of my nights with you, and how we're all going to share a bed one day. **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**"

After goldfish scooping they had tried a few other simple games and then gotten some cotton candy.

He came to a halt and sighed. " **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" His clone looked at him pleadingly. "You have to."

"I know," the clone went with shoulders slumped.

"Yukari again?" Moka took a bite of cotton candy and let it melt in her mouth.

"Yeah."

"What was it this time?"

"She brought up that time Kurumu visited me in my room."

"Ah," Moka blushed a bit. She could still remember her shock at hearing Kurumu utter the words, 'tied up and helpless.'

Seeing her blush he gave her a kiss. "Nothing like that is going to happen with Kurumu today, especially not with her *mom* there!"

"Of course," she relaxed. "Not even Kurumu is going to try anything with her mom around."

"So, would you like to show me just how skilled you really are?" Ageha asked.

Naruto looked at her. "I'm sorry, but skilled in what?"

"Love making of course." She took both his hands and pressed him against her magnificent breasts. "I'm curious to see if you really are as masterful as my daughter claims."

Oh kami this is not happening! Gaw! They feel amazing!! He turned beet red and tried to choke out some sort of reply.

"Mom! What are you doing?!" Kurumu demanded. "At least wait until we're somewhere private before you ask him something like that!"

That was it, Naruto immediately fainted.

"Oh!" Moka said excitedly and changed where they were headed. "Naruto-kun! Win me a prize!" She had always been envious of couples at a festival. She'd always wanted to have a boy win her something.

The large stall had a vast herd of big stuffed plush toys hanging from their ceiling. In the middle of the stall about five feet away was a series of empty beer bottles. The student who was manning the stall smiled at them. He'd been the one to convince his homeroom to run a ring toss and it was a huge success. His fellow students had been worried at the cost of getting so many toys. Fortunately he'd found a vendor who would allow them to be returned for a full refund. That meant so long as no one actually won the toys everything they made was pure profit that the students got to share.

The real trick had been to make the game seem very easy when it was actually excruciatingly hard. The plastic rings were just barely larger than the necks of the empty bottles. While it seemed easy enough it actually required a great deal of skill. Many boys had already stopped by determined to win something for their dates, only to walk away with nothing but an empty wallet.

The vendor gave Naruto a big smile. "Win something for the beautiful lady? You get five rings for just a hundred yen. Put any of the rings on a bottle and you win your choice of prize."

"All right," Naruto opened up gamachan and dug out a coin.

The vendor handed him five plastic rings. "Good luck."

With a bare flick of his wrist he tossed the rings.

Clink, clink, clink, clink, clink. The vendor stood there with his jaw open. "How the hell did you get all five?"

Naruto just shrugged, for someone who could hit a bulls eye with a kunai at twenty yards while running this was literally child's play. "I'm a ninja," was how he explained it.

"Yay!" Moka jumped up and down and applauded.

The vendor closed his mouth and reminded himself that handing out one toy was no big deal. "What would you like?"

"That one!" She eagerly pointed at a cute bright red fox. She then reached over and ran her fingers over her fiancé's cheeks. "I just think foxes are too cute!"

The vendor was relieved to see Naruto go and hoped not to see him again for the rest of the festival.

So he was rather disconcerted when he showed up ten minutes later. This time there was a different girl on his arm. She had purple hair and a lollipop in her mouth. Trailing slightly behind the couple was a woman who had to be the girl's mother.

"This looks interesting," Naruto said. "Would you like me to win you something?"

Mizore nodded. "Sure."

Naruto looked at the vendor. "How do you play?"

The vendor looked aback at him. "You're kidding right?"

"Huh?"

The vendor let out a sigh. Obviously this guy was some sort of player and didn't want his current girl to know he'd already been by. He really wanted to tell him to go away, but if he refused a customer he would get in trouble. So he played along.

"You get five rings for a hundred yen. If you can put a ring on one of the bottles you get your choice of prize."

Naruto nodded and produced a coin. The vendor handed him five plastic rings.

Clink, clink, clink, clink, clink.

"Amazing," the vendor said dryly.

Looking a little embarrassed Naruto just shrugged. "I'm a ninja."

"Right," the vendor looked at Mizore. "Which one would you like?"

"That one," she pointed at a penguin.

Naruto turned to look at Mizore's mother. "Would you like a souvenir Tsurara?"

Mizore's mother smiled and nodded. "That would be lovely, thank you Naruto."

He handed the vendor another coin. "Five more please."

Clink, clink, clink, clink, clink.

Twenty Minutes Later

"Yahoo! Naruto-kun win me some prizes!"

"Oh come on!" The annoyed vendor muttered to himself. He gave Naruto a smile that was not very friendly. "You're a popular guy tonight."

Naruto grinned and rubbed the back of his head. "Yeah, I guess I am." He did have two beautiful women with him after all. "So how do you play?"

The vendor sighed. "You get five rings for a hundred yen. If any of the rings land on a bottle you get your choice of prize."

"Sounds fun," he handed the man a coin and was given five plastic rings.

Clink, clink, clink, clink, clink.

"Yahoo! Naruto-kun you really are the best! I want that big stuffed rabbit."

Ageha leaned over and whispered in his ear while pressing her breasts into his back and sending a shiver down his spine. "Will you win something for me too Naruto-kun?"

"Su... sure," he got out another coin.

Clink, clink, clink, clink, clink.

"Quite amazing," the vendor said with a lack of enthusiasm.

Naruto gave an embarrassed shrug. "I'm a ninja."

"So I hear."

An Hour Later

Clink, clink, clink, clink, clink.

"All right!" An excited Yukari was jumping up and down. She already had four stuffed toys in her grip. "I'll get the kitty this time."

A weary vendor pulled down a stuffed cat and handed it to the girl.

"All right Yukari, I think that's enough," her mother said. She had a giant stuffed zebra under her arm.

"But mom I want enough of them to fill my room!"

Naruto looked over at her mom with an embarrassed grin. After all the misunderstandings he was eager to try and make a good impression any way he could. "I don't mind, I'm happy to get her as many as she wants."

The woman nodded a bit frostily. "I appreciate that, but there's no need to spoil her too much. And besides let's leave some for all the other people here."

"Thank you!" The vendor said with real feeling.

Naruto looked at him with an embarrassed grin and shrugged. "Sorry about all this, I'm a..."

"Ninja, I know, I know."

Once they left the vendor shut the stand down. He closed it just long enough to make a sign.

No Ninja Allowed!!

The rest of the day passed without major incident for Naruto or his clones.

"Thank you for a wonderful day," Tsurara said to him. "I am very happy to know that my daughter has someone like you to watch out

for her." She looked at her daughter. "You're right, he's a wonderful person. I like him too. Goodbye daughter, goodbye Naruto."

"Goodbye mother."

"Bye, it was really nice meeting you."

They watched her go. It was now early evening and the night time crowd buzzed around them.

He looked at Mizore. "How'd I do?"

She smiled up at him shyly. "You were the perfect boyfriend." She took her lollipop out of her mouth and gave him a light kiss on his cheek. "Thank you."

"You're welcome Mizore-chan. Well, since your mom is gone now I guess I may as well go too."

"Do you have to?" She asked. "Do you mind staying a while longer? I... I want this night to last as long as possible."

He looked at her and smiled. "I think I can do that."

"That was a very nice dinner. Thank you for treating us Naruto, and thank you for your delightful company." Ageha told him.

"It was my pleasure."

She turned to her daughter. "Kurumu dear, do you mind if I have a private talk with him before I go?"

Kurumu looked nervous. "You're not going to ask him to do anything naughty are you?"

She smiled. "Not this time, I promise."

"All right momma," she gave her mom a big hug. "Have a safe trip."

"You take care of yourself dear." She turned to Naruto. "Please walk me to my bus."

Naruto nodded and accompanied her feeling very nervous. Ageha waited until they were well out of earshot before speaking. (Succubi had great hearing.) "You don't actually love her do you?"

"What? No I..."

"It's all right," Ageha assured him. "I can tell these things. I can see you honestly care for my daughter, but that the feelings you have for her aren't love."

"I... I'm very sorry. I apologize for deceiving you."

She laughed. "Silly boy, you didn't deceive me and you have nothing to apologize for. You care enough about my daughter to spend the whole day trying to take care of her and me. That alone makes me very happy. And so you know, she knows that what you feel for her isn't love." Ageha sighed. "You should also know my daughter loves you."

"I know, she calls me her destined one."

Ageha stopped and Naruto did as well. "Do you know what those words mean? Do you know what it means for a succubus to tell man that he is her destined one?"

He nodded. "It means she wants to be with me."

"No, it means much more than that. I have seduced hundreds of men. I have made men give up their fortunes and their families just to be with me for a night. Some of them I liked, most I felt nothing for, and some I actively despised." Ageha told him. "But not one of them *mattered* to me. They were all just puppets for my amusement. I have loved *one* man, Kurumu's father, my destined one. For him I would have walked through fire. He died some years ago. I have loved no other man, and I will love no other man until my dying day.

Humans often mistake love and lust, but we succubi know the difference. We know that to inspire lust is easy, but to inspire true love is perhaps the hardest thing that any woman can try to do. You have created love in my daughter's heart. I ask you to stay with her in hopes that in time she will also create love in yours."

"That might happen," he answered carefully. "But if it doesn't I'm sure she will find someone else to love."

"You don't understand." Ageha shook her head. "Do not think because we inspire lust that our hearts are cruel. We are expert at keeping our hearts hidden, but once it is found a succubi's heart is very tender. Each of us will love only one man in our lifetimes. We have a single destined one and no other. You are her destined one Naruto, if you do not choose her she will never love another man, she will never have a family, she will be alone."

"What? But she's only sixteen! That's crazy!"

"That is our way."

He looked at her angrily. "So you're saying that if I don't choose her she's going to end up alone and it'll be my fault?"

"Yes."

"You can't ask something like that! You can't ask me to fall in love with her just because she chose me! It's not fair!"

"No it's not," Ageha said sadly. "And it's most unfair to her. I know I am asking a lot, but please just give her time and I know she will win your love eventually." She leaned forward and gave him a kiss on his cheek. "I know I will see you again Naruto. I can tell you are a good man and I know you will do the right thing."

Naruto stood there and watched her get on her bus.

It was almost ten and he and Moka were on one of the academy roof tops. Moka was holding her new toy fox which she had named Naruto (of course.) He was standing behind her as they were looking down on the thinning crowd. The first night was winding down.

"Did you have a good time Moka-chan?"

She sighed happily. "Wonderful, it was truly wonderful Naruto-kun. It was what I always hoped it would be like."

"Well I hope the next two nights go as well."

They both turned around at the sudden crash behind them. A powerful and fierce looking man stepped out of the broken doorway. "There you are!" He looked at Moka and licked his lips. "I've been waiting all night to get you alone." He glanced at Naruto. "If you want to live you should run now."

Moka and Naruto both looked at one another... and began to laugh.

"What's so damn funny?"

Naruto just shook his head. "Do you want to take care of him or should I?"

"You can go ahead Naruto-kun, but please don't kill him."

"Hey! This actually works out great; I can show you that magic trick I told you about."

The intruder eyed him with disgust and mounting anger. "You really think you can deal with me?"

Naruto simply smiled at him. "Want to see something *really* scary?" Suddenly he was surrounded by a powerful demonic aura. As both the intruder and Moka watched his body began to change. He grew a couple inches and his muscles seemed to thicken some. His hair grew out a bit and lightened to a platinum blonde. The scars on his

cheeks seemed to fade and then disappear. His eyes became red and slitted and a pair of fangs extended out of his mouth.

Witnessing this sudden change and feeling the immense power coming from him the man began to back away. "Wha... what are you?!"

Naruto moved with incredible speed and hit him with just one punch. It sent him flying clean through the protective fence and off the roof.

With that dealt with he calmly turned back to his girl.

The toy fox slipped out of her hands as she stared at him. "Naruto-kun," she whispered. "You're... you're..."

"A vampire," he said happily.

Tomorrow

"A vampire," she whispered. She could not take her eyes off of him. He looked absolutely amazing to her. The transformation had turned him into an older, 'adult' Naruto. With his scars gone he was the spitting image of the Yondaime Hokage (though of course she could not know that.) Except for his fangs and eyes. To her he looked absolutely amazing, though she did miss the scars. *He's beautiful!* "How... how did this happen? One injection shouldn't have been enough to turn you."

He was very surprised to see her reaction. He'd expected her to be excited. Instead she seemed nervous, and maybe even a little scared. "Moka-chan, you're not afraid of me are you?" He walked over to her.

"No of... of course not, but I don't understand how this could happen."

"Well, it's not like I'm an ordinary human Moka-chan. My body is used to transformation. After the blood you gave me saved my life it was absorbed into my system. I slowly discovered I could change into this form." He reached out and touched her cheek. She closed her eyes and shuddered. "What's wrong?"

His touch delighted her and fired all of her sense. "I am sorry Narutokun, when I gave you my blood I didn't mean to do this to you."

"Moka-chan what are you talking about? If you hadn't given me your blood I'd have died. And having a vampire form is nothing but great! All my senses have expanded, especially my sense of smell. My speed and physical strength are off the charts." He frowned.

"Though the one drawback is that I can't seem to perform jutsus in this form. But..." he was suddenly surrounded by his cloak. Four tails swung about. "It seems a **lot** easier for me to draw out the Kyuubi's power." He held out a hand and created a small flame.

Moka slowly nodded. "That... that would make some sense. Unlike a human a vampire is naturally able to draw out and use demonic energy. And I think your jutsus depend on a human chakra system, which you don't have now."

"But I was able to use the Kyuubi's chakra before."

She nodded. "Right, when you were either human or in your half human half yukai kitsune form. So you should have an easier time using your demonic abilities but an impossible time using your human ones. I expect the same will happen if you eventually develop a full youkai kitsune form."

"Interesting trade off," he mumbled. His cloak vanished. "I guess I'll have to keep using my kitsune form most of the time then."

She looked at him carefully. "So you can transform whenever you want?" He nodded. "So you haven't *really* become a vampire then?"

"Not permanently."

"Thank goodness! I was afraid I had changed you!"

He looked at her in surprise. "Would that be so bad? Me becoming a true vampire?" He put his arms around her and felt her shaking. "Are you scared of me? Moka-chan, whatever form I take I'm still Naruto. I would never hurt you."

She looked up at him. "It's... it's not fear Naruto-kun. Do... do you want to become a real vampire? I can make you one, but it would be permanent, I wouldn't be able to make you human again and I have no idea if you would still be able to transform."

He thought about it. "Not yet, but maybe one day." He smiled down at her. "After all, you're going to be my wife. It would probably make life much simpler if we were the same."

Being in his arms, feeling the power surging through him she couldn't resist her urges. She reached up to grab his face and bring his lips down to hers. She gave him a smothering and eager kiss. "Naruto-kun, take me back to my room!"

He couldn't help but smile. *Well I guess she's not afraid after all.* He reached down to grab the toy fox and then picked her up into his arms and leapt off the roof to race back to her dorm. It would have been faster for him to transform and then cast a shun shin. But he definitely had the feeling that she wanted him to stay in his current body.

"So what did you and my mother talk about?" Kurumu asked curiously. They were heading back to the festival even as it was beginning to wrap up.

"Nothing important," he said. "She just told me she hoped everything between us worked well."

She looked at him with sad eyes. "Too bad it won't." With a regretful sigh she let go of his arm. "Thank you Naruto-kun for spending all this time with me. You were wonderful, but since my mom's gone now you probably want go."

He looked at her. She wasn't being the bubbly excitable girl he was used to at the moment. Right now she seemed lonely, and the last thing he wanted was to leave her. He reached out and took her hand.

"Can we go to your room?" He asked quietly.

"What?" She looked at him in surprise and perhaps with just a tiny bit of hope.

"I just want to talk to you in private," he clarified.

She slowly nodded. "Sure, whatever you want." She stepped close to him. "Whatever you want."

He put his arms around her and pressed her close. They disappeared in a swirl of wind and leaves.

The band was playing the final song of the evening and only a handful of couples were still there. She had her arms around his shoulders and was leaning against him as they slowly swayed to the music. Her eyes were closed and her head was resting on his shoulder.

"I've never danced with a boy before," Mizore said dreamily. "It's nice."

"I'm glad you enjoy it."

All too soon the music ended. The few remaining couples applauded as the band wished them a good night and asked them to return tomorrow.

"I guess this means the festival is over for today." Mizore said calmly.

"I guess it does."

The two of them stood there as the other couples walked past.

Mizore looked down shyly. "How long could you last?"

"Hmmm?"

"Ah, I don't know anything about your magic. How long does a clone last?"

"Well, it varies, depending how much chakra gets used to make one clones can last for days or weeks. But I usually set a time limit. This clone was set to last twenty hours."

"So that would be right around dawn?"

"I guess."

"Would you stay with me until then?"

"Sure, I'd be happy to."

She looked up at him and a relieved grin crossed her face. "In that case," she carefully took a hold of his hand. "Let's go some place."

The two of them were standing there staring at each other.

"I thought you wanted to talk." Kurumu said.

He smiled and rubbed the back of his head. "Yeah, I did."

She swallowed and looked at him nervously. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"If... if you had never met Moka, if she had never come here, do you think I could have been the one?"

He grinned at her. "If I had never met Moka would you have even noticed me? Wouldn't I have been just one more of your puppets?"

"Maybe at first, but I think I'd have noticed you when you broke my charm."

He laughed slightly. "The only reason I broke your charm was because I was already falling for Moka-chan. If I hadn't met her I would have been following you like the rest of the lemmings."

"Then I guess it's really thanks to her that I wound up falling in love with you," she let out a bitter laugh. "So I guess I owe her my happiness and my sorrow." She looked away from him.

"Kurumu-chan, you know I care for you."

"You just care for Moka more."

He sighed, that was what it came down to in the end. No matter how much he cared for Kurumu, it was Moka who was in his heart.

Kurumu looked back up at him. "Make me your mistress."

"What?"

"Make me your mistress." She grabbed a hold of him and pressed her chest into his as she looked up at him pleadingly. "I'll take whatever scraps you'll give me and I swear I'll never complain or try to come between the two of you. I'll give you anything you want, any time you want, any way you want. I'll be your dirty little whore, your angel, your lover, your friend; I'll be whatever you want me to be. Just let me still see and be with you."

"Kurumu stop it!" He took her by the shoulders and pushed her away. "I love Moka; I could never betray her like that!"

Kurumu looked at him. "You really love her."

"Yes, I really do. I love her and only her."

"I know," she could feel her tears coming but couldn't hold them back any longer. She'd been holding back her tears the entire day. It had been a sweet torture, being with him, laughing with him, enjoying all his attention, pretending to be together. All the while knowing it was just one huge lie and that in the end she would be left all alone. Unable to bear his accusing gaze she looked down at the floor again. "I guess you must think I'm pretty pathetic huh?"

"Kurumu, please..."

"I mean you only just announce you're getting married and here I am trying to convince you to cheat on your wife before you've even set the date. I mean just how pathetic and desperate is that?"

"Kurumu..."

"Not to mention I'm going to stab Moka in the back... again. I really am a horrible person. I can't think about anyone else, I'm totally selfish. I look at you and all I can think about is that you're going to leave one day. You and Moka will marry and you'll go off to have a wonderful life together and I'll never see you again. And even though I know you love her and she loves you I still want to ruin things between you because I can't stand the thought of losing you! I love you Naruto-kun! I love you so much it hurts! I just want..."

Her words were abruptly cut off as he took her into his arms and held her close.

"I know," he whispered to her. "I know you love me, I know. I'm sorry Kurumu-chan, I'm so sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Feeling the warmth of his body and his strong arms around her let her tears subside a bit. "Do you hate me?" She asked in a small voice.

"No, I don't. I know what it's like to love someone. I know it can make us do crazy things, things that aren't always good." He took a breath. "Am I really the only man you'll ever love?"

"Yes," she answered him. "You are my destined one and I can never care for anyone else."

He looked down at her lovely face. *I could really love this girl, but my heart is already spoken for. It seems that no matter what I do I can only hurt her.* Even so he wanted to try and make her happy if he could, even if it could only be for a little while.

"We can kiss if you want."

She looked up at him. "Ki... kiss?"

He leaned down and easily covered her soft lips with his. "This clone," he whispered to her. "Has eight more hours. If you want, I can spend that time kissing and holding you. Moka said kissing was o.k. so I don't consider that to be betraying her. I won't take off my clothes and I won't go any further than kissing, but if you want we can be together for that long."

She looked into his kind face and smiled. "Yes, I want it."

Even if it wasn't real. Even if it wasn't what she truly hoped for, for the next eight hours a piece of him would be hers.

The two of them were sitting on the damp grass by the pond where they had first met.

"It's a little chilly, do you want my jacket?"

Mizore smiled at him. The idea of a snow girl feeling cold was funny. "That's o.k., but if you want to hold me close to keep me warm that would be fine."

He pulled her comfortably onto his lap and then wrapped his arms around her. "Are you sure this is where you want us to stay? I can take us back to your room with a jutsu."

She shook her head and settled comfortably against him. "No, this is where I want to be. This spot reminds me of the day we met."

"I remember, you know I always sort of wondered why you like me so much."

"It's because you have a kind and gentle heart."

He stared at her. "Are you being sarcastic?"

She looked up at him in surprise. "No, not at all."

"Mizore-chan I am not kind or gentle. I mean I may treat you and my other precious people that way but that isn't my true nature. You saw what happened to Gin, and there have been plenty of other times where my true side came out. I'm really a very cruel person."

"No you're not; a cruel person wouldn't have taken the time to just talk to me. And I've watched you, I've seen the way you look at Moka when you think you are alone with her. No one who was cruel could ever look at another person that way. You only act cruel because you've been hurt."

"How could you know that?" He asked a bit stiffly.

"Because I was hurt once too. The difference is that you dealt with it by fighting, I dealt with it by hiding myself." She looked at him shyly. "You know... I wish I could have you look at me the way you look at Moka."

"Ah..."

"You don't need to say it, I know you love her. I just wish it could have been me."

"Well... if I had never met Moka maybe it could have been."

"Re... really?"

"Why do you sound so surprised? You're sweet, kind, smart, brave, and very, very cute. You will definitely make some guy very happy some day."

"I wish it could have been you," she said softly. "I wish you could have been the one I was bound to."

"What do you mean bound to?"

She looked at him consideringly. "If I tell you a secret, will you swear not to tell anyone else?"

"I give you my word."

"Some time after I turn 17 next year I am going to have to marry and start having children."

"You are? Who's the lucky guy?"

"I have no idea."

"Huh?"

She sighed. "My race is slowly dying out. Snow girls can only have children from the time they begin their cycles until about their mid twenties. In order to preserve our race we snow girls must marry and begin having our families by the time we are 17. If I find someone I want to marry by then he and I can be bound to one another. But if not someone will be found for me."

"You'll be forced into an arranged marriage?" Thoughts about his own situation and Hinata came to mind. "What about love?"

"For the sake of our race's survival we consider the duty to have children more important than personal happiness."

"But don't you want to be with someone you love?"

She looked at him and smiled sadly. "We don't always get what we want."

During the night he and Mizore stayed wrapped in each other's arms. During these hours they talked and the two of them opened up and shared secrets. She confessed to him how she had fallen for an older man and innocently mistaken his interest for something nobler than it really was. He had tried to do things she had not wanted and she'd been forced to freeze him in order to make him stop. He was a respected member of the community and when he told everyone she had attacked him he was believed. When she had tried to tell people

the truth they had refused to believe her. After that she'd found it hard to open herself up and trust people.

He had told her about Konoha and about what it had been like for him growing up surrounded by people whom hated him. How he had been all alone until he had finally connected with Moka.

Despite their different personalities they had something in common. They both knew what it was like to be all alone.

Naruto looked up at the lightening sky. "It'll be dawn soon," he glanced at his watch. "My time is almost up."

"Do you know what I wish?"

"What?" He asked.

"I wish the world would end." She said calmly. "I want time to stop and never start again. I want it to stay night and for the dawn to never come."

"That's a pretty extreme wish." He said wryly.

"I can't help it, right now I'm happy." She looked at him longingly. "This moment you're with me and that's enough."

Somehow they wound up kissing. He couldn't recall if he had started kissing her or if it had been her that initiated it. But kissing at that moment felt like the most natural thing in the world.

The sun crossed the horizon and the horizon and day began. Naruto could feel the energy in him begin to fail. It was not at all painful but he knew he was about to go. He carefully pulled her off his lap and placed her down on the grass.

"Mizore-chan, I want to ask you something. Would you want to be with me if I were just human? If I had no powers at all but was just a plain ordinary man, would you still want to be bound to me?"

"Yes," she answered without hesitation.

"Come and talk to me after the festival is over. I will see you later Mizore-chan."

With a puff of smoke he was gone.

The morning light was streaming in through her bedroom window. They were lying on her bed, both still fully dressed. They were still kissing. She seemed incapable of getting enough kisses from him.

He looked at her clock and finally had to pull away from her.

"Don't go," she pleaded.

"I'm sorry Kurumu-chan, but it's almost time."

She nodded, unhappy but understanding. "Thank you for giving me this Naruto-kun, it meant a lot to me. All the time we were together with my mom and alone it meant a lot. I'll treasure these memories I swear."

He hesitated but decided to ask. "Kurumu-chan, if I were human and had no powers, if I were an ordinary man, would you still love me?"

"Of course! You're my destined one Naruto-kun, no matter what."

"So you would still want to be with me?"

"Yes, but why are you asking something like that?"

"Come and talk to me after the festival." He leaned in and gave her one last kiss. "I will see you later."

He disappeared with a puff of smoke.

The original Naruto opened his eyes. He'd gotten the memories of his two clones. They'd both had quite a night. Of course so had he. He quietly and carefully slipped out of Moka's bed. He was still in his vampire form. He'd been worried that Moka might have been afraid of him. Instead it had turned out she had just been VERY attracted to his new look. He had also discovered what sex was like in a body with advanced senses. That alone was worth the trouble of becoming a vampire. With a little bit of regret he transformed back into his human form and quickly got his clothes on.

"Naruto-kun, where are you going?" Moka's sleepy voice called to him.

Putting his jacket on he went over to her and kissed her. "Good morning Moka-chan, I'm just going back to my room, there's a special jutsu I want to take a look at."

"But what about the festival?" She sat up, careful to cover herself with the blanket. "You promised me you'd be my companion for the entire festival."

He smiled and kissed her again. "I haven't forgotten Moka-chan, meet me outside my dorm at quarter to ten and we'll spend the day together just like we did yesterday."

"Promise?"

"I promise! Now I need to go, I'll see you soon in a little bit."

He disappeared in a swirl of leaves and wind.

In his room he took Yukari's book out from its hiding place and flipped to a jutsu he had remembered thinking he would never have cause to use. Seventy years ago it had already fallen mostly out of favor, being considered too extreme and too costly to be worth practicing. Though he did not know it the jutsu he was looking for had long since been forgotten and was no longer actively taught

anywhere in the ninja lands. But it was in Yukari's seventy year old book.

"Found it," he opened up the book and began reading. "The doppelganger technique."

Two bodies were lying on the floor in pools of blood. Neither body looked human. One had a pig's face and the other was reptilian in appearance.

"Monsters," Itachi said calmly. "Who would have believed such a thing?"

"It's not that big a stretch is it?" Kisame was wiping his massive sword clean. "I mean in a world where demons, talking summons, and shinigami are all real why not monsters?"

"I must admit it is a perfect hiding place, an entire world separated from this one. And a world not easily reached." He was looking down at a bus schedule. "It seems we are indeed fortunate."

"Well it's about time we caught a damn break, we've been chasing him for four years."

Itachi nodded calmly. "Tomorrow."

The true enemy

"My parents are talking about pulling me out of the academy." Yukari said miserably. "They say this place is having a negative impact on my morals."

Naruto looked over at her. "Gee, I wonder why."

"But it's so not fair! When I wanted to leave they wouldn't let me. Now that I have you two they don't want me to stay."

"You do know this is all your own fault right?"

"How is it my fault?"

"Yukari," Naruto said patiently. "You made me sound like a child molester with all your talk about lovers and adult kisses and sharing beds. I mean you're eleven, you shouldn't even know about these things yet."

"I'll be twelve next month." She pouted. "Anyway, I'm a genius and I know about all sorts of things."

"But why do you talk so much about it?" Moka asked.

"What else would interest a girl but sex and romance?"

"But did you have to keep telling your *mom*?" Naruto said with a grimace. "Anyway, I thought you were working at the festival today."

"I traded with someone so I'll work tomorrow." She reached up and grabbed a hand from each of them as she walked between. "This way I can spend the *whole* day with both of you!"

Naruto and Moka shared a glance.

"That's nice," Moka said.

"Great," Naruto said.

"Then after the festival we can all go back to Moka's place and have a threesome!"

Naruto shook his head. "And you wonder why your parents are worried about your morals?"

The second day of the festival passed without any major incidents. Though they were all slightly annoyed to see a, ' No Ninja Allowed!!' sign on their favorite game. They ran into Kurumu and Mizore working at their different stalls. Kurumu had on a French maid outfit for a café. She asked Naruto if there was anything she could do for her, 'master.' Moka growled at her and Naruto got them moving before blood could be shed. Yukari was disappointed when at the end of the night she was NOT invited to join the two of them. Naruto and Moka had been a bit disappointed that they had not been allowed to be alone together, but had both still had fun. The post festival activities also helped make up for any disappointment.

The following morning the two of them woke up looking forward to the festival's last day.

The buses came that morning from all points of the human world and from the various monster worlds. Out of them poured a vast horde of alumni, children, and parents all eager to enjoy themselves. No one took any special notice of two men who walked a bit separately from the rest and followed in their wake. One of them looked to the other and whispered with a grin on his face.

"So we're ninja pretending to be monsters pretending to be human." Kisame laughed a bit. "Just thinking about it is confusing."

"If at all possible we must find and capture our target quickly and quietly." Itachi was focused completely on their goal. "Leaving this place is likely to be far more difficult than arriving was."

Kisame smirked. "No problem, I've always wanted to try and drive a bus."

Following the crowd they soon arrived at the academy. There were stands choking the grounds surrounding the school. Masses were already milling about.

"I don't believe it," Kisame said. "It *really* is a high school cultural festival! I wonder if they got any of those meat on the stick things."

Itachi glanced over at his disguised partner. "Do not become distracted. This will be a very difficult mission. Not only must we find and acquire the target in this mass but we have no idea how dangerous these bystanders may be."

Kisame snorted. "Those two we replaced were nothing."

"Not all ninja share the same level of strength. The same may well hold true of monsters." Itachi warned

"I'm not worried."

Itachi shook his head a bit but knew it was pointless to argue further. He instead took out the only picture they had of the target. It was an eight year old picture that had originally been taken for a passport when the target moved to Japan. Surprisingly enough the target had missed all his class picture days at school and had avoided being photographed. Having to rely on such an old photo was a bit of a handicap, but then how many people were likely to have spiky blonde hair and those distinctive scars on their cheeks?

"We have no choice; we will have to split up. If you can capture the target quietly then do so. Otherwise contact me."

"No problem," Kisame eagerly headed off in search of their target and a stand serving meat on a stick.

As soon as his partner had melted into the crowd Itachi let out a series of violent coughs. It was getting harder and harder to hide his sickness. Once the coughing fit passed he looked out onto the vast crowd.

Where are you hiding Uzumaki Naruto?

Naruto and Moka were just one couple on a crowded dance floor. Moka's smile seemed to light everything up. Seeing her happy just reminded him of how much he loved seeing her smile. When the music halted for a short break she led them away and back towards the outdoor stalls.

"I want some more cotton candy," she said cheerfully.

It amused him some times the small things that would make her happy. Despite all the pain and loneliness she had been through she could still treasure the small joys in life. When he thought about it he supposed he was a little like that too. After all just being near her was enough to make him happy.

"Why are you smiling like that?" She suddenly asked.

"I'm just happy to be with you," he told her.

Laughing she hugged his arm. "I'm happy to be with you too Naruto-kun."

Kisame had never attended a regular high school. Like almost all ninja he had been in a ninja academy then gone straight into the field. He found himself rather enjoying the festive atmosphere. He took another bite of the skewered meat he had and continued strolling through the crowded halls of the academy. The fact that he was completely surrounded by monsters did not bother him in the least. Unlike his partner he understood that life was temporary and so should be enjoyed. Oh he was serious about catching the

Uzumaki brat of course, but there was no reason not to have a little fun along the way.

Walking along he saw an interesting stand and approached it. There was a mat laid out and a large sign. Win ten thousand yen if you can steal his bell! (In small print it mentioned a two hundred yen entry fee required.) In the middle of the mat stood a large fellow with an eye patch, crazy spiked hair, and a martial arts uniform. Hanging off his black belt was a single tiny bell.

"Oh I have got to try this!" Kisame hurried up to the stand and paid his entry fee.

Kenpachi eyed him without any concern. "You don't need to worry, I won't attack you, I'll just keep you from taking the bell."

"Well that's awfully nice of you," Kisame said as he stepped onto the mat. "Say, just out of curiosity you wouldn't happen to know a guy with spiky blonde hair and three scars on each cheek would you?"

Kenpachi raised a surprised eyebrow. "You know Naruto?"

Now Kisame was the one who looked surprised. He hadn't expected to find anything. But since this guy was a martial artist it had seemed worth it just to ask. "Yeah good old Naruto, me and a friend have come all the way here just to say, 'hello.' I don't suppose you could tell me where I might find him?"

Kenpachi frowned at him. "According to Naruto he doesn't have any friends in the human world anymore. So I'm afraid I'm not going to tell you jack."

Smiling Kisame dropped his henge and stood exposed for all the world to see in his true form. He took Samehada off his back. "Well I'm afraid I'm going to have to insist."

The sight of a blue skinned, 'shark demon' caused an immediate stir and people began to quickly leave the area.

Kenpachi just simply grinned. "You're a ninja just like Naruto aren't you?"

"I sure am."

"I know I'm going to get in trouble for this but, what the hell."
Kenpachi released his true form and quickly began to grow and expand, needing to hunch over slightly to keep from hitting the high ceiling. He was a fifteen foot tall Cyclops. "I've been dying to really cut loose in a fight for awhile now."

Seeing the huge monster standing before him Kisame laughed. "I knew this was going to be a fun mission!"

The two of them were walking along in the middle of the crowd when a man stepped in front of them. "Pardon me, but are you Uzumaki Naruto?"

Naruto and Moka both stopped. Naruto eyed the man suspiciously. He was dressed in a cheap looking suit and seemed on the heavy side with big jowls and beady little eyes. But there was something about him that immediately set Naruto's teeth on edge.

"You know before asking someone's name it's considered polite to give your own name first." Naruto said casually.

The man nodded slightly. "Of course, please pardon me." His image disappeared in a momentary puff of smoke. When the smoke cleared a taller man was standing there in a black robe with red clouds, a leaf hitai-ite with a gash running through it, and red eyes. "I am Uchiha Itachi."

"I see," he nonchalantly reached over and pulled off Moka's rosary as he took on his three tailed kitsune form. As a vampire he could have drawn four tails worth of power, but he thought being able to use jutsus more valuable. Moka was caught by surprise as she transformed into her true form. The crowd was horrified to have not

one but two incredibly powerful demonic auras appear in their midst. In a sudden panic people began to scream and to run in whatever direction they could.

Through all this Itachi remained a calm and stoic figure.

"Naruto, what is going on here?" The now adult Moka demanded.

"This is Uchiha Itachi, a powerful ninja who once slaughtered his entire clan. He has come here to kill me."

Itachi calmly nodded. "To capture you is indeed the highest command given unto me by my organization. It would be best if you came along quietly."

"No one is going to hurt Naruto!" Moka raced forward with her usual blinding speed. She sent a kick straight for his head.

Itachi made no move to dodge. Her foot smacked into his face and flowed through meeting no resistance. His body seemed to melt and dissolve. It became inky black and suddenly hundreds of ravens burst free out of it. "It is already too late; you are both caught in my genjutsu."

"Coward!" Moka cursed angrily as she seemed to be buried within a swarm of ravens. Try as she might she could not get clear of them.

"Damn it, not good." From what he knew of Itachi, (thanks mainly to Kurumu's efforts with Jiraiya,) his sharingan gave him incredibly powerful genjutsus. He brought his hands together to dispel the effects, or at least tried to. He suddenly seemed to lose control of his right hand and it instead grabbed his own throat and began to choke him. To his horror all the skin and clothing on the right half of his body and began to peel away to reveal red fur and a fox's form underneath. He heard a wicked laugh fill his mind.

The day has finally come human. We both knew it would end like this. Now be a good little boy and just die!

His left hand grabbed his other wrist and tried to yank it off without effect. *Damn it this isn't real! It's an illusion! It's not real! Kai! Kai! Kai!*

The laughter boomed through his head again. **Who says it's not real fool? If it seems real, if it feels real, then guess what? It's real!**

Just the knowledge that it was an illusion didn't seem to help at all as his right hand continued to choke him. He fell to his knees as he tried to breathe.

All around him people were still screaming in panic. Itachi stood there and ignored them. To his eyes Naruto was on his knees choking himself while the strange girl was trying to swat at and fight off an endless stream of invisible phantoms. Despite their obvious power both of them had proven utterly helpless against him. In a moment the target would be unconscious. He would then simply toss him over his shoulder and leave. He was too focused on Naruto, because of that he very nearly missed the attack coming in from above.

As it was he only just dodged at the last instant. Her claws still caught him; they slice right through his fancy robe and cut deep into his chest. His blood suddenly gushed out of his wound and he cried out at the unexpected pain. The sudden shock was enough to break his concentration and end the genjutsu, freeing them both.

Suddenly freed of the genjutsu Naruto let go of his throat and gasped for air.

Moka saw the swarm of ravens dissolve like mist. She then spotted Itachi with Kurumu flying back around for a second attack.

"What did you do to Naruto?!" Kurumu screamed as she tried to slash at his throat.

In spite of the wound and its considerable pain Itachi was ready for her. Her attack was much too straight forward. He dodged her claws easily. He brought his fist up into the spot just below her rib cage. The viscous punch expelled all the air from her lungs and sent her crashing onto a nearby stall. His victory was short lived as Moka came at him with speed he had no hope of avoiding.

- "Coward! You think to defeat us with illusions and tricks? Know your place!" She slammed a fist into his face and sent him crashing into a gaming stall. She looked around to see Naruto still on his knees. "Naruto are you all right?"

Still gasping for air he simply nodded to her.

From the stand's wreckage Itachi cast a jutsu. "I am not limited to illusions, **Grand Fireball Technique.**" From out of his mouth came a dozen fiery boulders aimed at Naruto and Moka. The two of them were able to dodge away easily, but it provided Itachi the necessary distraction he needed to disappear.

Meanwhile the fireballs crashed through row after row of wooden and cloth stands setting them alight, before crashing into the academy itself. The huge building began to burn. All the people now really began to panic as they were surrounded by fire on all sides. Screams not only of the frightened but of the dying began to fill the air, not everyone had managed to avoid the fireballs or the ensuing fires. With people now fearing for survival many of them dropped their human disguises to help them escape.

Looking about Naruto couldn't believe just how quickly his bright carefree world had turned into a fiery version of hell. Seeing the confusion he shouted to Moka. "I'm going to help get some of these people out of here. **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" A couple hundred clones came into being. While he did not really see himself as the sentimental sort, he had come to care about the academy and the people of it. He did not want them hurt or killed if he could help it. The clones rushed around helping who they could. The original called to her. "Let's find Itachi." Moka nodded grimly.

Kurumu was still trying to regain her breath when she felt a pair of arms pull her out of the stall's wreckage.

"You really saved me Kurumu-chan. If you hadn't shown up I don't know what would have happened."

She looked at him. Despite his red eyes and deepened scars she was very glad to see his face. "Naruto... you... o.k.?"

He smiled at her. "Yeah, thanks to you. Now let me get you out of this hell." He quickly carried her away.

All around them his other clones helped people who were trapped or injured.

In a different section of the festival Mizore used her ice powers to try and fight the fires while Yukari did what she could.

A wounded Kisame came out of the academy, it had been a much harder fight than he'd expected. What got his attention as he exited wasn't that everything was on fire or that people were running around screaming. No, what he noted was that there were a whole bunch of spiky blonde haired kids going about helping people. He laughed. "It figures, we can't find a trace of him for four years and now he's everywhere." With Samehada he leapt out and eagerly began chopping off legs and arms as the surprised clones began to vanish in puffs of smoke. He'd find the real one sooner or later.

Naruto was looking for Itachi when three nearby clones disappeared in puffs of smoke. He saw a kunai strike his cloak and bounce away. Looking up at the direction it had come from he spotted a figure on the academy roof top.

"There you are," he muttered angrily. He performed some hand signs and was gone.

"What are you doing?" An angry woman's voice called.

Having just destroyed another handful of clones Kisame looked up to see a beautiful girl with silver hair and red slitted eyes. He could sense the power coming off her.

"Your clothing is like the other one we fought. Are you Naruto's enemy as well?"

He smiled. "Ah, so you've run into Itachi. Yeah, he and I are here to bring Naruto back with us. He has something we want."

"The demon inside of him," the girl said with certainty.

Kisame nodded. "That's right, we're after the Kyuubi. We have no interest in him otherwise. If you want I'll even bring him back after we're done with the extraction."

"Removing the demon would kill him," she said angrily.

Kisame laughed. "I didn't say anything about bringing him back alive."

She glared at him. "In that case I am going to kill you. Naruto is my beloved and I will destroy anyone who tries to harm him."

"Well that's just fine. Before we do this though, could you tell me just what sort of monster you are?"

"I am a vampire," she answered coolly.

"Heh, so I get to defeat a Cyclops and a vampire? Man this is turning out to be a hell of a good day!" He drew back Samehada and came right at her.

She stood her ground and made no effort to dodge as he aimed for her neck. At the last instant she brought up a single hand and caught

the blade. Kisame was shocked. As he tried to wrench it free he found he could not pull it out of her grasp.

"You think you can defeat a vampire so easily? Know your place!" She pulled the sword out of his grasp and delivered a kick that sent him to the ground. She took his huge sword into both hands. The instant she did so metal spikes shot out of the handle stabbing into her palms. Despite that she continued to hold onto the sword.

Kisame got back up to his feet. "Samehada was made specifically for me; I'm the only one who can wield it." He nodded toward her bleeding hands. "It hurts doesn't it?"

"It does," she admitted. "However..." She moved with speed he had never seen before and slammed his sword into his chest. With monstrous and inhuman strength she tore it into him all the way to the handle. "My wounds will heal."

Seeing his chest completely torn open she released her hold. Kisame stumbled backwards and fell into a burning stall. He was too wounded to get up. Moka calmly walked away as she heard his screams and smelled his flesh begin to cook. Looking about she wondered where Naruto had gotten.

Naruto materialized on the roof in his three tail youkai kitsune form. Facing him was a badly wounded and still bleeding Itachi.

"You don't look so good," Naruto said happily.

"Perhaps, but I am still strong enough to complete my mission." In that instant Naruto realized he'd made the same damn mistake as he felt everything around him turn to black.

Naruto found himself standing in the middle of a cemetery. Up above him there was a full moon. Looking at the tombstones they were all identical.

'Here lies the Kyuubi.'

"What the hell?" Naruto muttered.

"The image is from your own mind," a calm voice told him. "But this place is the Tsukuyomi, the nightmare realm. Here I completely control time, space, and even all substance."

Naruto turned around to see a completely unwounded Itachi. He ran at him, only to see him disappear before he could reach him.

"That is not necessary Naruto," he turned around to see Itachi standing behind him again. "I am not your enemy."

"Really?" Naruto said sarcastically. "You came here to kill me; you sure seem like an enemy."

"Like this realm, that is an illusion. In truth I am a deep cover agent still in service to Konoha."

Naruto stared at him. "You expect me to believe that?! You slaughtered your whole clan! Was that to establish your cover?"

"No," Itachi replied calmly. "That was done to preserve Konoha from a civil war. My clan had been on the verge of launching a coup attempt. I was forced to choose between my loyalty to my clan and to my village. In the end I felt my greater duty was to the Hokage and to the village."

"So you killed your whole family in cold blood?"

"Yes, all except my little brother Sasuke. But that has nothing to do with my mission."

Naruto got into a fighting stance. "I know, you're here to capture me." But to his surprise Itachi shook his head.

"No, I have come here to help you and prevent Akatsuki from acquiring you." In the blink of an eye the two of them were standing

before the mausoleum that held the Kyuubi.

"What the hell are we doing here?"

"As I said," Itachi replied. "I am here to help you." He turned to face the two large eyes staring out at him. "I have come here to free you from the Kyuubi's influence."

The sharingan, your eyes are far more wicked and cruel than mine. Naruto was surprised to hear what sounded like fear in the fox's voice. **They are as evil as Madara's.**

"I am nothing like Madara," Itachi said with a small bit of anger. "Now be gone forever."

Wait...

There was a shake in the ground and the mausoleum sank quickly and quietly into the earth.

Itachi turned back to Naruto. "You are free now, I cannot kill him, but I have buried him so deep and so completely into your subconscious that he will never again be able to emerge. You are now free to acquire his power without his personality being able to influence you in any way."

Naruto stared at him, not believing it. "You actually helped me? Why?"

"It is for the village. Akatsuki must never acquire your power, they are a lethal threat not only to Konoha but to the world." He looked at Naruto carefully. "I am dying, even without the wound inflicted on me today I would have died soon. No one must ever know the truth, for my brother's sake I will die the greatest traitor the village has ever known."

"You don't have to die," Naruto said. "I have a way that can save you, even heal whatever is wrong with you."

Itachi shook his head. "No, it is best this way. I have done my duty to my village and to my brother, that is enough. However, I will ask two favors of you Uzumaki Naruto. One I will tell you everything I know of Akatsuki while we are in this place. Return to Konoha and pass on the information to the Hokage."

Naruto nodded. "I will tell the Hokage about this," he said carefully.

"My second request is..."

Naruto frowned, he didn't like what was being asked of him, but he still nodded. "I'll honor your request, I give you my word."

Naruto came awake again on the academy roof top after what seemed like hours. He saw Itachi gasp and collapse. He ran over to him and knelt over a gasping and pale Itachi.

"Will you keep your word?" Itachi whispered.

"I will."

Itachi nodded and closed his eyes. He stopped breathing, a look of peace on his face.

Goodbyes and a hello

The Headmaster stood amid the charred ruins of the academy. "Well they certainly did a thorough job of it." He let out a depressed sigh. "No more ninja."

"Expelled?!" Moka said furiously. "How could he expel you for defending yourself?"

"I don't blame him," Naruto said as he calmly packed his things. "I mean the academy was burned down by a ninja after all. He probably figures it never would have happened if I weren't here."

"But you almost died dealing with ANTI-THESIS for him! How can he be so ungrateful?"

"As far as ANTI-THESIS goes that account has been settled." He touched the rosary he was wearing. "I really don't hold his decision against him, and it's all academic anyway. With the academy closing indefinitely it doesn't matter. Since Akatsuki knows where I am it's not like I would have come back anyway."

Though still looking upset she reluctantly nodded. "So where do you want to go Naruto-kun? We can go anywhere you want in the human world or to any monster world."

He smiled at her playfully. "So you don't mind coming with me? Even if it means you won't be returning?"

"Naruto-kun, please don't be an idiot," she said seriously. "As your future wife of course I am coming with you. My place is with you now, always. So tell me, where do you want to go?"

He grimaced a bit before answering. "Konoha."

"Konoha?" She said in surprise. "But what about your plans to become a missing nin and never go there again?"

He sighed and continued to pack. "I thought I would have more time. As it is I'm not strong enough yet. I mean the fact Itachi got me as bad as he did is proof of that. My ultimate goal hasn't changed any, believe me Moka-chan," he said grimly. "But I have to be patient."

"Patient for how long Naruto-kun?"

"Until I can access *all* the power inside me. On that day I'll settle things with my village once and for all." He sighed. "But from what Kuyou says it may still take years."

"But what about me?" She asked fearfully. "Where will I be during this time?"

He looked at her in surprise. "You'll be right beside me of course, you don't think I would be apart from you do you? And especially not for years."

"But... but how will we hide the fact that I am a vampire?"

"We won't be able to, not in a village filled with ninja. So we'll just tell everyone you come from an extinct clan with a *very* unusual kekkei genkai. And besides," he stopped to take a hold of her hand. "I'll just tell them that if they want to use me as their tool they'll just accept you as my wife."

"Wife?"

He nodded. "I know it's sooner than we planned, I'm sorry I can't give you whatever kind of wedding you wanted. But if we're going to live in that damn village for awhile this would be the best way. If the Hokage really plans on making me a clan head then as my wife no one would dare touch you. Even if you are a foreigner and strange your position as the wife of a clan head would shield you." He began

rubbing the back of his head nervously. "Ah, that is if you're o.k. with us getting married so quick."

In answer she leaned in and kissed him. "We can get married right now if you want Naruto-kun. Don't worry about the ceremony, so long as I become your wife that is all that counts."

"Thanks Moka-chan, I 'm glad you're o.k. with this. Now there is something else I want to talk to you about. It involves Mizore and Kurumu. There is something I want to do for them, something pretty big." He handed her Yukari's book already opened to the correct page.

She took a look. "Doppelgangers?"

"That's right, you see..."

Since the academy would be closed for an indefinite period of time while it was rebuilt all the students were being forced to return to their homes. The next day the buses would take them to locations throughout the human and various monster worlds. So this was the very last day many of them would ever be at the academy. Many people were hurrying to make sure they could say their goodbyes.

Many of the beds in the infirmary were filled with burn victims. Kenpachi was among the very few there for another reason. He'd suffered multiple wounds and serious blood loss. Despite the near fatal beating he'd taken though he was in light spirits.

"That was the best fight I'd had in quite awhile," he laughed. "I'm actually sorry to hear you killed him Moka. I would have loved a rematch."

Naruto and Moka had both come to visit him and say their goodbyes. "I am really sorry that you were dragged into my problems Kenpachi-sempai." Naruto gave his sempai a deep bow. He did not simply give

people respect; his respect had to be earned. After months of hellish practice sessions and endless bruises to his poor body Kenpachi had definitely gotten Naruto's respect and friendship.

Kenpachi laughed at that. "Don't worry about it, like I said I enjoyed it. It was good getting to know you too. I'm sorry I won't see you again."

"I feel the same way, even if it was painful." That drew another laugh from Kenpachi. "Goodbye Kenpachi-sempai."

His farewell with Kuyou was much less heartfelt, though he respected him too, in a way.

"I'm going to still need your services from time to time." Naruto told him bluntly. "When I need you I'll just summon you."

Kuyou frowned; he didn't like the idea of just being summoned away to the human world at Naruto's convenience. However... "I am at the service of the Great Lord."

Naruto grinned, he was so going to enjoy the day when he could tell the smug kitsune that, 'Lord Kyuubi' had gone bye bye.

He said goodbye to all his teachers and to a handful of fellow students. That evening he, Moka, Yukari, Mizore, and Kurumu had a last meal together in the cafeteria. It was quiet and solemn, they all knew this was goodbye and that very likely they would not ever be together again as a group. When Naruto asked them to meet in Moka's room they all readily agreed. For once Naruto did not have to teleport or sneak in; the usual rules were being ignored. A good number of boys could be seen going in and out of rooms as various girls were saying their own goodbyes.

Once they were in Moka's room Naruto turned to the Mizore and Kurumu. "I asked both of you just three days ago if you would want

to be with me even if I was an ordinary human. You both said you would. Do you still feel that way?"

"Of course," Kurumu said.

"Yes," Mizore answered.

"Naruto-kun, why are you asking us this?" Kurumu inquired. "This is the last night before we all go our separate ways." She said sadly.

"I'm asking because there's a way for both of you to be with me."

Mizore and Kurumu both looked surprised but eager to hear more.

"I thought you weren't willing to share." Mizore said to Moka.

"I am not," Moka said firmly. "But I'll let you be with his brothers."

"You have brothers?" Kurumu said in surprise. "I thought you were an orphan."

Mizore shook her head. "I want to be with you Naruto, not a brother of yours."

"What if he were my identical twin and had all my memories and feelings?"

Kurumu frowned. "You're planning to make clones for us? I don't mind but don't they come with a time limit?"

"No, I'm not making clones. Clones can have physical substance and even experience emotions and independent thought, but in the end they only seem alive. Their bodies are composed of chakra, they aren't actual living beings. There is however a jutsu that can create doppelgangers. These are real live flesh and blood human beings. The jutsu was originally created in order to safe guard the lives of certain vital people. They would create a human copy that was perfect and send him to live in secret while the original continued

with his life. If the original person was killed then at least he would go on living in a different form."

"That's amazing!" Yukari said. "So far as I know there's no magical spell that can do anything like that!"

"Well there's a price. First off, the copy is completely human, he won't ever be able to use chakra or work a jutsu. Second, in order to create the doppelganger the caster must give up five years of his lifespan."

"What?!" Kurumu shouted horrified. "No way! You can't do that Naruto-kun!"

Mizore remained calm but shook her head. "I appreciate what you are trying to do Naruto, but you can't give up ten years of your life."

Kurumu glared at Moka. "How can you be o.k. with this?" She demanded.

"Because Naruto has already decided that he will become a vampire one day." Moka answered. "A vampire's lifespan can last thousands of years, so ten years is not much of a sacrifice."

"You're going to become a vampire?" Kurumu asked.

Naruto nodded. "That's right, I was thinking about it before. But when Moka told me the difference in our lifespans I knew I had to if I was going to marry her."

Moka nodded happily. "He is not going to leave me as a widow for a millennium or more."

"So the bottom line is that I can make each of you an exact copy of me as I am at this moment. All the same memories and all the same feelings. But from the moment I create them they'll be separate beings living their own lives. When they die I won't get their memories. We really will be like brothers more than like clones."

"You're really willing to make this sacrifice for us?" Mizore asked quietly.

"That's right; you are both precious to me. You both put yourselves in danger for my sake, and I want to do right by you, I want you both to be happy." He looked at Kurumu. "I don't want you to end up alone." He looked at Mizore. "I don't want you to end up trapped in a love less marriage."

"What about me?" Yukari piped up. "I want to be with you too."

Naruto shook his head. "And how exactly are you going to explain to your folks that you've brought home a sixteen year old child molester to live with you?"

She frowned unhappily. "But I want to be with you and Moka! It's not fair that I have to lose you both."

He smiled sympathetically at the little witch. "If you still feel that way in four years come find us and we'll talk."

"Naruto-kun," Kurumu asked. "This copy will have *all* your memories?"

"That's right."

"So he'll know about that thing you do with your tongue?" Kurumu asked eagerly.

Mizore looked interested. "You mean kissing?"

Kurumu wore a huge smile. "No, not kissing."

Moka suddenly looked at Naruto with real anger. "You showed her, 'open the flower' ?!"

"Open the flower?" Yukari asked keenly. "What's that?"

Naruto was blushing a deep red. "Hey! We're getting a little off topic here!"

Mizore nodded. "Will we be able to have children?"

"Yeah, they'll be completely human, so they can father children."

"Will they have your amazing stamina?" Kurumu wanted to know.

Naruto shook his head. "Ah sorry, I get that from my demon side, so my doppelgangers won't have it. But they'll be healthy and sixteen."

Kurumu looked somewhat disappointed and Moka actually flashed her a triumphant grin. But even so she informed him that she wanted what he was offering. "If he really will have all your memories and feelings then he's you, and I'll love him."

Mizore nodded as well. "If he has your same kind heart then I want to be with him, power or no power."

"All right then, if you're both sure let me go ahead and do it." He began to perform a very long series of hand signs. **Doppelganger Technique** ."

Two large puffs of smoke filled the room momentarily. When the smoke cleared two additional Narutos stood there. They were exact copies down to the scars on their cheeks and the shade of blue in their eyes.

Kurumu immediately embraced the one nearest her. "Darling! We are going to be so happy together!"

Mizore smiled shyly and slipped an arm around his.

Both girls were truly happy that they would get to be with Naruto.

Yukari pouted and promised her self she would track Naruto and Moka down as soon as she was sixteen.

The friends said their final farewells and went back to their own rooms. Kurumu was planning to, 'test' just how much stamina the human version of Naruto had.

Moka and Naruto were alone together at last.

"Well you made them both very happy," Moka said.

"I'm glad," Naruto admitted. "Even if we never meet again I want them to both be happy."

Moka nodded. "Naruto-kun, I've also come to an important decision. Or I should say me and my other self have."

"What's that?" He asked a little nervously.

"We have both decided that it's time to destroy the rosary and return to being just one person. We will become the true Moka again."

"What? But why now all of a sudden?"

She smiled at him. "When I take the vows to become your wife I want to be the woman you'll be with for the rest of your life, not just a side of her."

He stared at her. She had told him this day would come, but he hadn't expected it to come this soon.

"What's wrong Naruto-kun? Why do you look so sad?"

"I'm never going to see you again," he said. "You, this Moka, the girl who ran into me on her bike. The girl who I fought to protect, the girl who always walked with me to class, the first girl I really fell in love with. You're going to disappear."

She smiled and nodded. "Don't be sad my love." She leaned in and stood on her toes to kiss him. Like always her kisses were gentle, oh he was going to miss her gentleness! "It's true that this body will disappear as will this personality, but not my love for you. My love for

you, my feelings for you, those will live on in my true self. Everything that I feel for you in my heart will remain." She leaned in again and gave him another kiss, this one a little longer and more passionate. "Make love to me," she whispered to him. "Make love to this me one last time."

Picking her up he carried her to the bed and did just that.

He knew that the other Moka loved him. He had no doubts at all that when their personalities finally merged that the true Moka would love him. The truth was he found the adult Moka's body sexier and more attractive. And he liked her confidence and strength. But, even though there was an intense and fiery passion between them there was a certain connection missing. That was not to suggest she did not care for him or that her love for him was any less real. It was simply she showed her love in a different way. The adult Moka never called him Naruto-kun. She called him Naruto or her beloved. It was a small thing, and not really important, but he would miss the way teen Moka would call him Naruto-kun and think nothing of it.

He would miss her.

They waved goodbye to their friends as one by one they left. It was good to see Kurumu and Mizore so happy. If he really never saw them again his last memory of them would be of their smiles. They watched as all the buses departed.

In the end it was just the two of them.

The beautiful teen Moka smiled at him, her green eyes as beautiful as they'd been on that first day. "It's time Naruto-kun, give me one last kiss."

"Happy to Moka-chan." He leaned down and gave her a long sweet kiss, trying to make it last for as long as he could.

She was completely content. "Take off my rosary Naruto-kun."

"Goodbye Moka-chan," he whispered as he pulled it off for the final time.

She was surrounded by demonic power and transformed into her adult self. Seeing his face the adult Moka reached out and gently touched his cheek. "Do not be sad my beloved, you have not lost anyone. We will both still be with you, always."

Her words and her touch reminded him that she could be gentle as well, she just showed it differently.

She took the rosary from him. "Now you will finally meet Moka." With that she crushed the rosary in her fist. Energy sparked and flowed out of the shattered gem and into her. Her body froze for an instant and he noticed one very slight change. Her hair. It went from being pure silver to having just the slightest reddish tint to it. The energy dissipated and Moka slowly began to move again.

"Are you all right Moka-chan?"

She smiled at him. It was a gentle smile. "I'm fine my beloved Naruto-kun." She gave him an eager kiss. Her kiss was filled with confidence and certainty. "I am very happy to finally meet you. Are you ready to go?"

He nodded and put his arms around her. They both had back packs on with the things they had decided to bring. "Yeah, let's go."

A black fire surrounded them, together they left Youkai Academy.

Uzumaki Naruto has come home

The old monk was humming to himself as he swept up the old shrine. It was a tiny out of the way structure that only the locals ever visited. The sort of place where nothing ever happened. Like a thousand other local shrines that were spread throughout Fire country.

"Excuse me."

The old monk stopped to see a young man standing at the entrance. The fellow had spiky blonde hair and the strangest set of scars on his face. He knew immediately he wasn't a local. It seemed today he was going to enjoy a visit by one of those rare travelers who occasionally passed through.

"Yes? How may I help you young man?" His dress was quite odd. He had on a green jacket, white shirt, bright orange tie, and khaki pants. It looked like some type of school uniform, but not one he'd ever seen before.

"Could you perform a wedding for me?"

"A wedding?" The old monk was quite surprised. In the forty plus years he'd been the caretaker of this shrine he had never married anyone who had not lived within twenty miles of it. Travelers occasionally stopped to make an offering to appeal to kami for good fortune. But an actual wedding? "Well certainly I can perform one."

"Would it be legal throughout Fire country?"

The old monk shook his head and laughed. "It would be legal everywhere, not much point in marrying someone otherwise is there?"

The blonde smirked a bit. "I suppose not. Can you marry me and my fiancé right now?"

He nodded and put the broom aside, this was turning out to be a very interesting day. "Certainly, where is she?"

"Moka-chan," the stranger called out and motioned.

The monk gasped to see the woman who came up beside him. He hardly noticed that she was dressed in a similar uniform or that she had long darkish silver hair. No, what took him by surprise was her red eyes and fangs as well as the sense of power coming off her.

"Hello," she said pleasantly.

"Ah, hello," the monk replied a bit nervously.

Seeing the reaction the blonde tried to smile reassuringly. "Ah, she'd from a clan with a really unusual kekkei genkai," he explained.

"Right!" Moka said. "Because I'm a ninja."

"I see," the monk said slowly. "Please forgive my reaction; I have never seen a ninja before."

Moka grinned at him. "No problem, I'm used to it."

"So how much would it cost?" The young man asked.

"There is no charge, however if you wish to leave a donation afterwards that would be appreciated."

The monk went back into his small office to retrieve the necessary documents. As he watched the young couple fill them out he learned the groom's name was Uzumaki Naruto while the bride's was Akashiya Moka.

"Are you certain you want to marry right now? You don't have any family with you."

Naruto shook his head. "I'm an orphan. She has family but they're a long way from here and she's not that close to any of them."

"Well, I like my mother and my younger sister," Moka said. "But it would be difficult to reach them."

"I see," the monk said. "Still, marriage is a serious commitment and one that should not be taken lightly, you are both young. Are you certain you want to marry right now?"

Smiling Naruto took a hold of his fiancé's hand. "We have no doubts at all about wanting to marry, and there's a reason why it needs to be now."

"Ah, I think I understand." The monk glanced at Moka's belly, she wasn't showing. "Very well then."

The ceremony itself was simple and brief. It was completed in less than fifteen minutes. The young couple exchanged vows and pledged their commitment to one another. At the completion of it they sealed their new union with a kiss.

"Thank you for helping us," Naruto said.

The monk nodded, it had been a pleasant and memorable diversion to an otherwise boring day. "I was very happy to do so. May kami bless your union and grant you long life and happiness."

"And children!" Moka added, causing Naruto to look just a little pale. Moka winked at him. "Eventually."

"Anyway, here is a token of our appreciation." Naruto pulled out a cloth sack and handed it to the monk.

The monk accepted it warily. It seemed rather full. "Ah, yes, you are both welcome." He was curious what might be in the sack, but it would be rude to ask or check while they were standing in front of him. Whatever it was, it was a donation after all. He waited for the two of them to leave before carefully opening the sack to see what was inside.

They had only gone about twenty yards when they heard a piercing scream come from the shrine behind them.

"Naruto-kun," she asked. "What was in that sack?"

"You remember those bandits we dealt with on our little vacation?" She nodded. "I gave him all the cash I took from them. I never bothered to count it all but there's probably about two million ryu or so."

Moka lifted a single eyebrow. "You gave him that much just for performing our wedding ceremony?"

He shrugged. "It's only money, and what I really treasure is right here beside me." He gave her hand a gentle squeeze.

"You're sweet," she said. "By the way, you remember when one of my personalities told you that if you ever abandoned me or slept with another woman I would hunt you down and kill you?"

"Yeah, that would be sort of hard to forget."

She gave him a kiss and looked at him tenderly. "It still applies."

"Heh, good to know."

"So, are we off to Konoha now, husband?" She took real pleasure in adding that last word.

"No wife," he looked at her. "Let's go to the nearest town. I need to get some new clothes. And I think we should get a hotel suite. It'll be short, but let's have a honeymoon."

She laughed at him fondly. "And how are we going to pay for this since you gave away all our money?"

"Not all of it," he held out a gamachan that was near bursting.

Together the new couple headed off.

At that same moment...

"What do you mean you don't know where he is?!" Jiraiya screamed.

The Headmaster nodded toward the blackened ruins of the academy. "As you can see for yourself I was forced to close the school and send the students home. Besides which I have expelled Naruto and instituted a ban on ninja attending this institution in the future. You may inform your Hokage I will have no further dealings with him."

"I don't think you need to worry about that." Jiraiya shook his head. The moment he'd received word that there had been an attack on Naruto he'd come as soon as transport could be arranged. He had never thought to arrive and find Naruto just gone. "You're sure he was unhurt?"

The Headmaster nodded. "He was uninjured, though the same cannot be said of a great many others. When I agreed to your Hokage's request he never mentioned this possibility."

"The whole reason he was sent here in the first place was in the hope that our enemies would never be able to find him. Can you at least give me some hint of where he might be now?"

"He was given a bus assignment to return him to the same location where he was originally picked up. The city of Tokyo I believe. However he did not leave by bus."

"I thought it was impossible to get here except on one of those crazy things."

"I and certain others have the ability to travel across dimensions. He left with one such person."

"Who?"

"He left with the help of his girlfriend Moka."

Jiraiya recalled the red eyed beauty from his last visit. He had sensed her power but never suspected she could do such a thing. They had gotten the news that Naruto had reached the four tailed state only a couple days earlier. Then had come the shocking information that he had been attacked by enemy ninja. And now he was just simply gone.

"Do you have *any* idea where he might be now?"

"None," the Headmaster said tranquilly. "He is no longer my concern."

"Great, just great," Jiraiya muttered. "I need to get back immediately."

The Headmaster nodded. "Certainly, and with your return I will have nothing more to do with you or any other ninja."

He watched Jiraiya enter the bus that would return him. He had not told him of Naruto's rosary. Just as he had honored the Hokage's request he had honored Naruto's as well. He understood what the likely consequences would be. But had decided not to involve himself any further.

Whatever happened between Naruto and his fellow ninja would be of their own doing.

The following morning a black fire momentarily appeared on the roof top of an old apartment building. When it blinked out there was a blonde haired figure in a black ninja outfit and a woman in a bright yellow sun dress.

Naruto took a long moment to look out upon the village he had not seen in eight long years. *How I long to see this place burn.*

With a cruel smile he called out. "I'm home."

Four flowers

Naruto pointed to the cliff wall in the distance. "That's the Hokage monument. The face of each Hokage is carved into it and memorialized for all of time. The fourth one over is Namikaze Minato, my father and the man who put the Kyuubi into me."

Moka looked at him with slight concern. "You sound bitter; I thought you said you'd forgiven him."

"I did forgive him," Naruto admitted. "But I guess I'm still a little bit bitter. He's considered the greatest ninja this village ever produced. His memory is worshipped almost like he were a kami. Meanwhile his son got treated like the lowest kind of scum for something that wasn't his fault or his choice." He chuckled sourly. "Of course at the time I had no idea who I was or why I was treated so badly. All I knew was that everyone hated me. Now that I know the truth how could anyone blame me for being bitter?"

"Try not to feel too upset about your father. After all," she gently stroked his cheek. "If it weren't for him you wouldn't be so cute now would you?"

He smiled at her and laughed a bit. "Come on Moka-chan, let's go." Taking her hand they both leapt off the building.

Ino sighed and turned the page of the fashion magazine she was reading. "This sucks," she muttered to herself. She was a beautiful sexy sixteen year old Chunin who was finally back in Konoha after a six month tour on the Suna front. "I should be going out on dates with Sasuke-kun, I should be shopping with Forehead, I should have Shika and Chouji fawning over me and trying to get my attention." She let out a huge sigh. "Instead I'm here."

For Ino, 'here' was her family's flower shop. Despite being a veteran enjoying a respite between tours her mom had not thought twice about having her spend her precious free time covering the counter. She might as well have been a little girl again.

Thinking that made her feel even more depressed. In some ways her life seemed to be in a real rut. Despite all her attempts to win him over Sasuke remained perpetually disinterested in her. The only positive she could find when it came to him was that he was at least consistent and just as uninterested in Sakura. She was finally getting sick of his unending rejections and his disdainful attitude towards her and women in general. She had actually started to flirt a little with Shikamaru. He was lazy but also cute and intelligent. And while he might make fun of her at times he at least paid attention to her. She even thought he was interested in her, though of course he was too lazy to take any initiative.

She'd seen enough in the war to understand that nothing in life was certain. She had already wasted too much time on Sasuke. Maybe it really was time to move on and give Shika a chance.

A little bell above the door jingled as it was opened. "Welcome to the Yamanaka flower shop," she sang out automatically. She put the magazine away as her eyes darted to her customer. *Now what do we have here?* He was a cute looking blonde boy with scars on his cheek. From his dress he looked like he was a ninja, though she didn't recognize him and he had no hitai-ite. Even though she was sure he was a stranger she got the weirdest feeling that she had seen him before. "How can I help you?"

He went directly up to the counter. "I'd like to buy four white chrysanthemums please."

She instantly felt a touch of sympathy for him. "Ah, yes sure, I'm afraid we keep a large stock on hand. What with the war and all." White chrysanthemums were the traditional flowers of mourning and of funerals. "Did you recently lose someone?" She asked sympathetically.

"No, they're for four people I lost a long time ago."

She nodded as she got his order ready. "That's good that you remember them," she looked a bit sad. "I lost my father a bout a year ago; he was on a mission in Sound. My mother and I leave fresh flowers on his grave every week."

"How nice," Naruto said politely. *I'm sure it's a huge sacrifice considering you own a flower shop.*

"I don't mean to be nosey," Ino said as she was about to be nosey. "But you're dressed like a ninja yet I'm sure I've never seen you before."

"Actually you have Ino, though I don't blame you for not remembering me, it was a long time ago. I remember you though."

"Really? When did we know each other?" She was now officially intrigued, especially since he recalled her name. "The flowers will be fourteen hundred ryu please."

Naruto pulled a pair of thousand ryu notes out of his purse. "I was a classmate of yours back during your very first semester at the Ninja Academy."

At the mention of the academy everything suddenly snapped back into her mind. "I remember you! Those scars on your cheeks! You used to wear that really ugly orange jumpsuit and be loud and annoying all the time. You're Naruto aren't you?"

"I am." He took his change and his flowers.

Ino eyed him up and down appreciatively; he was a good looking guy. She actually thought he looked a little like the Yondaime. "Wow! You certainly have changes since then."

"Thank you, you on the other hand seem a lot like the girl I knew back then."

"Re... really?" She felt herself blush a little.

"Yes," he was smiling. "You were a vain shallow little girl who cared only about looks and what other people thought. You fawned over Sasuke and you treated me like dirt, and you probably did both just because it was what people expected."

"WHAT?!" Ino shouted furiously.

Still smiling he headed out the door he waved cheerfully. "Anyway, thank you for the flowers."

Waiting outside patiently for him was Moka.

"Thanks for letting me go in by myself; I figured it would just be faster that way."

"No problem Naruto-kun, but I'm curious why I am feeling killer intent coming from a flower shop." Moka asked. She slipped her arm through his.

"I ran into an old classmate."

Moka frowned a bit. "Was he really still so angry with you after so many years?"

"It was a her, and she didn't remember me."

"Then why is there killer intent?" She asked curiously.

"I reminded her who I was and I told her what I thought of her from back in those days."

"From the reaction I am guessing it wasn't very complimentary."

Naruto shrugged. "It was the truth."

"The truth? Isn't that rather dangerous given how you really feel about this place?"

He gave her an amused look. "I thought you detested liars."

"And I thought you lied to protect yourself."

"Oh I'm still going to lie to people Moka-chan," Naruto told her. "But I'm only going to lie when it's necessary for our protection or to further my plans. When I was little I used to do everything I could to try and get people to be nice to me. And no matter what I said or did it never helped. They beat me and they abused me just because they could." He wore a savage smile. "So fuck them. Fuck every last one of them. I'm not a helpless child anymore. I won't try to get them to like me. I won't kowtow to them. I won't run away and hide. And kami help *anyone* who tries to abuse me now."

They visited the shrines first.

In Konoha people believed in the, 'will of fire.' It was a special form of ancestor worship. People worshipped not only their own ancestors but those of previous generations who had loved and given their all for the sake of the village. So it was not surprising that special care was given to the Hokages, who were after all symbols of that will of fire. Each Hokage had his body laid to rest within his own shrine.

The very first place they went to visit was the Yondaime's shrine. That was not due to special feelings on Naruto's part. It was due to the pragmatic fact that he knew where the shrine was. Even though it was a Tuesday morning they were not the first to visit, there were already flowers and small offerings laid out. Naruto put down one of the flowers.

"I forgive you father, and hope you can find peace one day." That was all he had to say. He bowed his head to his father's image and left.

For her part Moka offered a respectful nod and then followed him.

Naruto had to ask around to find out where the Third Hokage's shrine was. When they found it they saw it was smaller than the Yondaime's. Inside there were no flowers or offerings, Naruto's was the first it seemed. Unlike at his father's shrine Naruto actually knelt down and offered up some prayers. Moka did not pray, but she stood there silent and respectful, honoring her husband's feelings and beliefs.

Leaving the Third's shrine Naruto suddenly spoke. "He was a good man. I don't agree with some of the things he did, but at least he tried. He was one of the very few who gave a damn about me, and for that he will always love him."

"Then I am very glad you had him to watch out for you Naruto-kun."

Finding his mom's grave had proven very difficult. He had thought that since she'd been the Yondaime's wife that she might have been buried along side him. But not only had she not been there, there had no mention anywhere of her existence or the fact that the Yondaime had ever been married. He had asked around but no one seemed to have even heard of her. Finally in desperation he had simply gone looking through the gravestones in the section reserved for the burial of foreigners.

And sure enough, he'd finally found her. 'Uzumaki Kushina,' had been given a humble tombstone that had listed nothing more than her name and the dates of her short life. Her grave was identical to the ones on either side of her. Naruto laid down his flower and spoke his prayers. Then he stood up and stared down at the gravestone.

"Bastards," he muttered furiously.

"What is it beloved?"

He pointed. "Her tombstone says Uzumaki, but she was married to my father. It was a secret marriage, to protect her from his enemies, but Jiraiya and the Council all knew about it. By all rights she should be interred next to my father, the same way Sarutobi's wife was. But no, they wouldn't even allow her to receive his name. They probably didn't like the image of their greatest hero in love with and married to a kunoichi from another village. So after she died in *childbirth* giving their beloved Yondaime a son and heir they buried her here without any special honors, just one more dead foreigner. Though I suppose I should be glad for one thing."

"What's that?"

"They at least gave me her name, and for that I'm grateful." He reached out and touched her grave. "I'm going to build you a shrine mom, one deserving of you. And I'm going to lay you to rest there." An angry smile touched his face. "Right beside dad."

He laid his last flower at the memorial stone. He reached out and touched the letters that were carved into it. **Umino Iruka** . He had died in Wind country and his body had never been recovered.

"I really wish we could have met again sensei. I met and fell in love with the most amazing girl. I know you would have liked her. If you were still here things would be different."

Naruto looked about carefully to make sure there was no one else around except for Moka. He took out a hitai-ite with a deep scratch in it and laid it down beside his flower. "You gave this to me once, and told me that in your eyes I was a ninja. That was the proudest moment of my life. I am sorry, but I must return this to you now. Because I will never be the ninja you wanted me to be. I hope that you can forgive me for what I intend to do. And if you cannot forgive I hope you will at least understand." He brought his hands together in silent prayer and bowed his head.

"There's no choice," Hiashi said wearily. "We'll have to send out the entire hunter nin force to try and find him."

"We'll have to keep it secret that we're looking for him. If Akatsuki picks up that he's missing they'll begin a general search as well." Jiraiya said.

The Fifth Hokage nodded. "I want you to also turn all your spy networks over to this. Any hint of any individual matching his description is to be reported immediately."

Jiraiya nodded. "I intend to go out myself and see what I can find. After all if he is traveling with a red eyed silver haired woman that is bound to draw attention." Jiraiya sighed. "Unless they're under a henge or illusion. We'll find him but it may take awhile."

There was a timid knock of the Hokage's office door.

Hiashi frowned. "I said I was not to be disturbed."

The door opened a crack and his secretary stuck his head in. He was a middle aged man of the cadet branch. "Please forgive me Hiashi-sama, but there are two people here requesting an audience who I believe you will want to meet."

Hiashi frowned, Hideo had been his secretary for twenty years, and knew better than to waste his time. If he thought it important enough to disturb him...

"Who are they Hideo?"

"Uzumaki Naruto and his wife Uzumaki Moka."

"Wife?!" Jiraiya said stunned.

Hiashi was just as stunned, and far more angry. *How dare he refuse my daughter and take someone else as his first wife!* "Send them in," the Hokage said curtly.

Hideo was expert at reading the moods of his enigmatic master and knew he was furious though he showed almost nothing. He nodded and swiftly disappeared.

A moment later the door opened again and two people entered the Hokage's office arm in arm. Meeting the Fifth Hokage for the very first time Naruto smiled at him and gave him a bow that was every inch polite and proper.

"Uzumaki Naruto reporting in Hokage-sama."

It was going to be an interesting meeting.

A leash

Half An Hour Earlier

Naruto and Moka were walking back from the memorial. The park was nearly empty, but they both noted the looks they drew from the handful of people who were there. One mother actually scooped up her child and quickly left. For Naruto it was reminder of what the past had been like and what the future held.

"I know how much you hate lairs Moka-chan," Naruto said quietly. "But for as long as we're here we'll both have to wear masks."

She looked over at him carefully; he had mentioned this before when they had discussed coming here. "Does that mean you will become the silly prankster again?"

"No," he said curtly. "I guess my pride has grown since I met you and started really getting strong, but I won't play the fool anymore."

"Then what role do you have in mind Naruto-kun?"

He smiled wickedly. "I was thinking I'd play to all their fears and expectations and be a vicious little monster."

She lifted an eyebrow. "But won't that cause trouble?"

"Yeah, it sure will," he said merrily. "But I'm sure that the Hokage and other people *expect* me to be trouble. The easiest way to fool people is to just play into their expectations. If you show someone what they already expect to see they usually won't question it. And I'm sure that just so long as the Hokage thinks he has a leash on me he'll give me a fair amount of room."

"Why must we pretend at all?" She frowned at him. "We are both powerful, why must we indulge in this deceit?"

"We're powerful," he nodded. "But not powerful enough. I'm sure together we could handle any combination of ninja in this village, even including Jiraiya. But if we had to fight the entire village we wouldn't stand a chance. So for now we'll lie and even do a little play acting if necessary. No one can know how much I hate this village or how much you hate humans. So I'll play the role of the angry, but leashed, monster. And you will be my sweet and understanding wife."

She laughed slightly. "And that is a role? Am I *not* your sweet and understanding wife?"

He grinned. "To *me* you are Moka-chan. But you'll have to be that way to all of them too."

She sighed, but nodded. "If it helps you my husband I will do it, though I loathe them not just for being human but for the way they have treated you."

Naruto nodded. He was actually looking forward to it. When he'd first arrived at Youkai Academy he'd found himself in a similar situation, surrounded by potential enemies who would kill him if they learned the truth. He'd survived Youkai Academy (he had even prospered) and he would survive Konoha too. In fact he intended to not just survive but to have a whole lot of fun.

Until the time finally came.

Having greeted the Hokage Naruto turned to Jiraiya. "Nice to see you too godfather."

Jiraiya frowned at him. "Naruto where have you been for the past day?"

He had a huge smile as he took Moka's hand. "I just took a day to marry my beautiful wife here and have a quick honeymoon before reporting in. Is that a problem?"

The Hokage leaned back in his seat and steepled his fingers before his face. "You were not granted permission to marry." He said coolly.

Naruto looked at his supreme leader and held firm to his smile. "And why would I need permission? Sixteen is the age of maturity in Fire country. Both Moka and I are old enough to marry without anyone's permission."

"From the message you sent me I was under the impression you did not intend to ever marry." The Hokage said.

Message? Jiraiya wondered.

"I changed my mind."

"I was able to wear him down," Moka said teasingly.

Hiashi turned his attention to her. " **Byakugan.**" The veins about his eyes popped up as he activated his blood line. "You do not possess a chakra system, as I suspected given the aura of power about you and the fact you were at that academy. You are not human; therefore your marriage is invalid."

"Don't even try!" Naruto said menacingly.

The Hokage made a simple hand sign. "**Pain.**"

"Aaaah!" Naruto screamed and fell to the floor clutching his chest.

"Naruto-kun!" Moka immediately dropped down beside her husband.

Hiashi ended the effect after only three seconds. "I trust you will be more respectful towards me. You will *never* use that tone when addressing me."

"What did you do?!" Moka demanded angrily. She helped Naruto get back up to his feet.

"I merely reminded him that he is to be respectful of his Hokage like every other ninja of this village."

Despite standing shakily he glared at Hiashi. "But I'm not like every other ninja though am I? If I were you wouldn't have needed this," he pointed to his chest.

The Hokage frowned at him. Despite the demonstration he did not seem properly cowed. "I do not wish to compel you to fulfill your duties, on the contrary I would much prefer you act on your own accord. However I will have obedience from you in one way or another."

Naruto carefully let go of his wife and stood on his own two feet. "If you plan on trying to take Moka from me you better just go ahead and kill me. I'd sooner be dead than live without her." He grinned mockingly. "Though I guess that would ruin all your plans for the Namikaze fortune and me leading the army to glory and all that crap."

"And I will kill you or anyone else who tries to separate me from my husband." Moka said as Hiashi felt a disturbing amount of killer intent focused in his direction.

"Now, now," Jiraiya stepped forward into the brewing disaster. "I'm sure that isn't necessary. You can have three wives after all, though I am certain the Hokage would have preferred that Hinata had been your first wife, second wife will do."

The Hokage frowned. He had not intended to have to negotiate. By all rights Naruto should have done as he was told without argument. But both he and the girl had meant exactly what they'd said. And Naruto had been quite correct in saying his death would ruin all the plans Hiashi had made. If Naruto really was ready to die rather than be separated from this girl...

"If you will agree to take Hinata as your second wife I will not object to your so called, 'marriage' to this woman."

Naruto was about to tell him to go to hell when he felt Moka's hand fall on his shoulder.

"He will agree to marry your daughter on the condition that it will be nothing but a political act. He will never love her or consummate the marriage. She will be his wife in name only."

Naruto looked at her in shock. "Moka-chan what are you saying?!"

Moka looked over at him calmly. "It is all right Naruto, marrying the Hokage's daughter will make things easier for you in this village. So long as she is never in your bed I will accept this as a political necessity."

The Hokage frowned. It was well and good for him to bend others to his own needs. But he did not like the thought of his eldest daughter being used as a bargaining chip. "My daughter is considered one of the most beautiful and desirable maidens in all of Fire country. I have had requests for her hand in marriage not only from the most powerful ninja clans but also from the wealthiest and most powerful men on this continent."

"Then give her to one of them," Naruto said. "Let her marry someone who actually wants her and might love her. Moka-chan is the only woman I will ever love or want."

The Hokage frowned; the fact was there was no other connection better than to Namikaze. Whatever he thought of Naruto personally he remained the last tie to the legendary Yondaime and to the vast fortune and Council seat that belonged to the Namikaze. It was a combination of wealth and influence that no other suitor could possibly match, not even the last Uchiha.

"You will marry my daughter in one week's time. I will accept that this will only be a political marriage for now. But Hinata is a very sweet and charming girl, perhaps your opinion will change eventually."

"Don't count on it," Moka said sweetly.

Hiashi eyed the strange woman with carefully hidden contempt. That she was a barrier to his long term goal was obvious. He wanted an heir to the Namikaze clan born from his own daughter. Once there was an heir in place with Hyuuga blood....

Well, Naruto was just too dangerous to have around permanently. But for right now he was needed to win the war and father an heir. Once those things were done he would no longer be necessary to either the village or to the Hyuuga.

"Along with marrying my daughter I will also expect you to quickly increase your power further and to act in my interests as both Namikaze clan head and Council member."

"In other words you want me to be a bad ass killer as soon as possible and to be your political puppet too." Naruto shrugged. "Fine, honestly I don't give a damn so I'll be your killer and destroy your enemies. I'll vote your way and say whatever you want me to say. But just so we're clear about something I'm not taking any abuse from anyone in this village. If anyone tries to treat me the way they used to I'll make them regret it."

He sounds like another Gaara. Hiashi thought unhappily. *But for the time being he is needed. If some sacrifices must be made to keep him pliable so be it.* "I understand, and I assure you I will work to make certain people treat you as you deserve, Namikaze Naruto."

Naruto grimaced at the name change, but nodded. Like the marriage to Hinata it would make things easier for him. "I was wondering, do you suppose I could meet some people? I was thinking maybe I could throw a little party for them in my new mansion."

The Hokage was very surprised by what sounded like a reasonable and sensible request. "Who do you wish to meet?"

"I want to meet with the Council members as well as all the clan heads, including Uchiha Sasuke."

The Hokage nodded. "I think that a fine idea, hosting a celebration at the Namikaze mansion will make an excellent first impression. We can have it take place tomorrow and use the occasion to announce your marriage to Hinata."

"Great," Naruto said dully.

Jiraiya then smiled. "After that Naruto I'll be overseeing your training. The Hokage has decided to give you to me as a second apprentice. I'll warn you I plan to work you hard. I understand the only jutsus you know are henge and substitution. I'll be busy teaching you new jutsus."

"Oh, yeah, I can't wait to finally learn some new jutsus." He hoped he sounded enthusiastic enough.

Jiraiya nodded. "And just so you know you'll be training alongside Uchiha Sasuke."

"Sasuke is your other apprentice?" Naruto asked. "Do you think I could meet with him today, I really want to talk to him."

"There some special reason you want to talk to him?" Jiraiya asked.

"Well I did kill his brother."

Both men suddenly stared at him at the bombshell he had just dropped.

"Naruto," Hiashi spoke eagerly. "Are you saying you killed Uchiha Itachi?"

Naruto shrugged. "Well he said that was his name and he had red eyes. He got a lethal wound from someone else, but technically he died while facing me." Both men continued to stare at him. "Did I do something wrong? I was only defending myself."

"You killed the greatest traitor this village has ever known." Hiashi stated. "This will do wonders for your reputation."

"Hmmm, I wonder how Sasuke will take the news." Jiraiya said. "I think I should warn you he may not appreciate the fact you killed him."

"Well of course not, they were brothers."

Jiraiya shook his head. "That's not the reason. He hated his brother and built up his whole life around his ambition to take revenge against him. You've just robbed him of his life's ambition, he may not appreciate it."

"My heart bleeds for the poor guy; anyway I'd like to talk to him if I could."

"He's out of the village at the moment," Jiraiya informed him. "But I'll make sure he attends the party tomorrow."

"I am curious Naruto just how did you defeat Itachi?" The Hokage asked. "Even if he was wounded he would have been an extraordinary enemy."

"Well," Naruto said simply. "He placed me under some kind of genjutsu where he entered my mind. I think he called it, 'Tsukuyomi.' In my mind he faced the Kyuubi. When the genjutsu ended he collapsed and shortly died." What he had just told them was technically true. Of course he left out some minor details, like the fact the Kyuubi was no longer a personality in his mind or that he'd gained a wealth of classified information about Akatsuki and other things. The Hokage had denied him information about everything from Iruka's death to the fact there was an organization after him. He took a certain pleasure in returning the favor.

Itachi had asked him to pass on all the information to the Hokage. Naruto had answered circumspectly, 'I will tell the Hokage about this.' And he just had, he'd told the Hokage about his meeting with Itachi. He had however never specifically promised to say anything about the information. Even if it was a bit of a cheat Naruto had

technically kept his word. To sort of make up for that he would truly make an effort on the second request from Itachi.

Both the Hokage and Jiraiya seemed to accept Naruto's explanation that implied that the Kyuubi had been the cause of Itachi's death.

"So does that mean the second ninja was his partner Kisame?" Jiraiya asked.

"His partner was a blue skinned ninja who looked like a shark demon rather than a human." Moka answered. "I killed him with his own sword."

"You defeated Kisame in single combat?" Jiraiya asked carefully. Moka nodded and both his and Hiashi's opinion of her rose several notches. Anyone who was a match for the likes of Kisame was not to be taken lightly.

After an extended question and answer session Jiraiya agreed to lead both of them to the Namikaze mansion. As they went the two of them stayed a few steps behind him.

Moka leaned over and whispered in his ear. "When that bastard tried to hurt you, did he? The way you screamed, I was afraid."

Smiling he gave her a bare shake of the head and whispered back. "I felt a twinge on my chest but no pain at all. Like I said, the best way to fool people is to show them what they expect to see."

Neither Jiraiya nor the Hokage suspected that the leash that had been placed on him had been slipped off.

The lifeblood of ninja

The Namikaze estates were a few miles from the Tower. As the three of them walked along Naruto and Moka both noted the looks they were drawing. Seeing those looks on people's faces brought Naruto right back to the old days. Of course back then he'd also felt confused and guilty whenever people would glare at him. He didn't know why they were doing it and thought it had to be his fault somehow.

Being with Jiraiya seemed to mitigate things as no one did more than look.

When they finally reached the estates they discovered they were located next door to the Hyuuga. "You and the Hokage are going to be neighbors." Jiraiya announced.

"Great," Naruto said dully.

The estates themselves were about three square miles and surrounded by a ten foot tall wrought iron fence. The main gate was open and the three of them traveled up the walkway. There were trees and other vegetation all along the perimeter of the estates, effectively hiding the mansion from public view. It was only after walking a ways that they cleared the woods and got a clear look.

It was magnificent. The building was three stories and made of white stone that seemed to almost shine in the sunlight. There was a wide and neatly mowed lawn in front and he could spot a pond or small lake directly behind the massive building. To the side there were a number of shrubs with many flowers growing. It really was something to look at. He also noted that there were a number of people standing outside the main entrance patiently awaiting their arrival.

Jiraiya handed him a large key ring with fifty or so keys on it. "These are the master keys, until just recently this entire area was sealed

and secured. When the Hokage learned what had happened he ordered it readied for you, he even hired a staff on your behalf."

"How nice of him," Naruto muttered.

Moka's impression was a bit different. "It's not too bad; it's about half the size of the castle I grew up in." Jiraiya and Naruto both looked at her.

"You're joking," Jiraiya said.

"Not at all," Moka replied. "My father, Lord Akashiya, was a very powerful and wealthy man. I grew up with all the wealth and material comfort anyone could want." She looked at Naruto and pressed herself a little closer to him. "And I hated it."

Naruto smiled at her. "Well growing up poor isn't much fun either. Speaking of which," he glanced at Jiraiya. "Why was that exactly? If all this belonged to me why did I have to end up in a crappy one bedroom efficiency in the worst part of the village?"

Jiraiya frowned at him. "It was decided that for your own safety you could not have any of the fortune until you were an adult. As for growing up poor I did too Naruto, a ninja shouldn't require a lot of comforts."

"I wasn't a ninja then, and I don't think having hot water or decent locks on the door, or enough food to not be hungry would have been asking too much."

"You didn't have enough food?" Moka said sounding upset.

He gave her an embarrassed look. "Well old man Sarutobi gave me a decent stipend that *should* have been enough. But the shop owners either refused to sell to me or they charged me three or four times what everyone else paid. The reason I fell in love with ramen was because it was so cheap, and there was this little ramen shop that was the only place it was safe for me to eat at."

"So even though you were the only son of their most beloved hero you were allowed to go hungry?" She glared at Jiraiya. "What a wonderful place this is."

"Now Moka-chan don't be mad at my godfather, he had nothing to do with any of that. After all," Naruto said pleasantly. "He'd long since forgotten about me by then."

Jiraiya sighed. "I've already told you how sorry I am for that Naruto. I'm here now. Doesn't that count for something?"

"Not really. You see godfather the funny thing is that I don't really want or need any of this. The mansion, the money, the Namikaze name, your help, these were all things I'd have wanted back when I was a helpless kid. They don't matter to me now." He looked at Moka and gently squeezed her hand. "I already have everything I need."

Jiraiya could see that things between the two of them were still not improved. He could only hope to change that over time. As they approached the mansion one of the servants stepped forward. He was short grey haired man in a neat black suit. He bowed low to them.

"Welcome to the Namikaze estates, I am Tenzen the master servant." He looked carefully to Naruto. "Are you Naruto-sama?"

Naruto actually began to laugh. "No, I am definitely **not** Naruto-sama."

"You may as well get used to it Naruto," Jiraiya told him. "As head of the Namikaze clan you definitely are a lord now."

"There is nothing wrong with letting the servants be respectful to you," Moka added. "It's good that they know their place."

"Yeah, I'm not really interested in titles." He gave Tenzen a big smile. "Are these all the servants the Hokage hired for me?"

The man nodded respectfully. "Yes, Naruto-sama, we wanted to come out and welcome you to your ancestral home."

"My ancestral home? Well how nice, and I'm glad you're all here, that'll make things quicker." He looked past Tenzen to the gathered servants. "You're all fired; please get your things and go."

"What?" Tenzen looked shocked. The other servants all began to talk as well.

"Don't worry; I'll give you all a month's salary as compensation. But please leave."

Moka frowned at him but did not say anything.

"What the hell are you doing Naruto?" Jiraiya demanded.

"I've never needed anyone to take care of me before and I don't now." He said simply.

"This place has over three hundred rooms," Jiraiya pointed out.

"Moka-chan and I won't be using all of them. I'm sure we'll be fine without any hired help." He looked at her. "Right Moka-chan?"

Though still frowning she nodded. "If you say so Naruto."

Naruto turned back to Jiraiya. "Well thanks for bringing us here godfather. I look forward to seeing you and Sasuke tomorrow."

"Don't you want me to at least give you a tour of this place?"

"Nope, I like exploring."

It took awhile for all the servants to get their personal belongings and go. Naruto made a point of watching every last one of them depart and then shutting and locking the main gate.

Back inside the mansion Moka was waiting on him in the vast ball room just inside the entrance.

"Why did you fire the servants?" She asked. "I didn't say anything in front of Jiraiya but he did have a point you know. Do you really expect the two of us to be able to take care of this huge place?"

"Fifteen servants means fifteen spies," Naruto said. "You can bet they'd tell the Hokage and others about everything they saw or heard. There's no way to I'm letting that many strangers get close to me."

"Hmmm, well I'll admit I hadn't thought of that. But still, how are we going to run this place with just the two of us?"

He just grinned at her. " **Kage Bushin no Jutsu** ." With a massive puff of smoke a hundred clones appeared, all of them holding a set of the master keys. "There we go, all the help we could ever need, and no doubts about loyalty. Now let's explore guys!" The clones gave a cheer and got moving in every direction with most heading up the grand staircase. When they were eventually dispelled he would have a thorough understanding of the mansion and grounds.

Moka gave him an amused look. "Well I'll admit that's one solution. But how are you going to explain being able to perform that jutsu since you only know two of them?"

"Every clan house has a private library with jutsu scrolls. I'll just tell everyone I stumbled on the right scroll and learned it in a single night." He laughed a bit. "I get the feeling I'll be picking up a lot of jutsus out of the library, and I think I'll learn the ones Jiraiya teaches me pretty quick too."

Using the clones Naruto was able to figure out where things were in short order. The mansion had an indoor pool, a dojo, a cavernous kitchen, a library (with jutsu scrolls), and much else. Such as the master bedroom

Moka flopped down onto the wide bed. She liked how soft and comfortable it was, her body felt as though it were slowly sinking down into it. Still lying on her back she glanced up at her husband. "Care to join me?" She teased. She was surprised when he didn't immediately answer her. "Naruto-kun?"

He was staring at a portrait that was on the wall. It was of his parents, they were dressed up in traditional clothing and both looking very happy. "This is their wedding portrait," he said quietly. "They were married less than a year. I'm sure they thought they were going to have a long and happy life together."

She silently slid off the bed and came over to his side, putting her arms around him. "We aren't them beloved." She carefully turned his head away from the portrait and towards her. "We *are* going to have a long and happy life together."

"How can you be so sure?" He asked a little morosely.

She smiled easily. "Because I know that you'll do whatever it takes to make it happen." She kissed him and felt his soft lips touching hers. "Now let's go to bed."

He gave her a mischievous look. "Not just yet, could you turn around for a second?"

Not sure why she did so. "Like this?"

"Yeah."

She heard and felt the zipper to her dress being undone and the air caressing her body as her dress slipped to the floor.

He put his lips to her ear and whispered, "I love taking your clothes off."

A delicious little shiver ran through her as his hands began removing her bra.

They didn't get much sleep that night.

Sasuke made it back to the village early the next morning. He was surprised to find his sensei waiting for him.

"Morning sensei, anything wrong?"

"That all depends on your definition of right and wrong."

Sasuke looked at him. "What is that supposed to mean?"

"Come with me Sasuke," Jiraiya said to him. "We have to talk."

"What do you mean Itachi's dead?" Sasuke demanded.

"I mean just that, he is no longer among the living. This was always a possibility Sasuke, no matter how powerful a ninja is *no one* is invincible."

Sasuke fumed at the flip way his sensei tried to explain things. The truth was he had always just assumed that one day he would be the one to end his brother's life. He had never seriously considered any other possibility. Now his family would never be avenged. For Itachi to have died at his hands would have been vengeance and justice on behalf of the Uchiha clan. Itachi dying any other way was just a random act of an uncaring and fickle universe. By sheer luck someone had defeated his brother and now his family would never be avenged.

His life's ambition had been a failure.

"Who killed him?" Sasuke asked darkly.

"Ah, well now it's funny you should ask. You'll be meeting him tonight and starting tomorrow he'll be joining us in training and eventually on

missions. He is Namikaze Naruto, son of the Yondaime and new clan head of Namikaze."

Sasuke gawked at him. "I thought the Namikaze clan was extinct."

"The Yondaime had a son on the same night that he died. His existence was kept a secret and he was sent out of the village for his own safety. Itachi attacked him and was defeated."

Sasuke wasn't sure what to think. It was all too bizarre. The Yondaime had an heir and he had just robbed him of his destiny. He decided for the time being to withhold judgment. "I look forward to meeting him." He said coolly.

"Actually you have already met; he was in your first year ninja academy class for a month before he was sent out of the village."

Sasuke frowned. "You're mistaken; the only Naruto I remember from back then was this loud baka who was always wearing orange."

"He's no baka Sasuke and he doesn't wear orange any more."

Sasuke just stared at him not believing it. "You have to be kidding! *That* idiot killed Itachi and he's the Yondaime's son and a clan head?!"

Jiraiya sighed. "Whatever impression you have of him from back then I suggest you wipe it from your mind. He's very dangerous and powerful and is only going to grow more so."

Sasuke frowned but kept his thoughts on that to himself. "Whatever, I want to talk to him."

"You'll get your chance tonight. He's throwing a party for the Council members and clan heads."

"Fine, I can wait until then. Right now I need to talk to the Hokage."

"Huh? What for?"

"If Itachi really is dead then it's time for me to begin work on my second ambition."

The Hokage had been surprised by Sasuke's sudden request for a meeting. But as usual he was willing to accommodate the Uchiha clan head and agreed to meet with him immediately. As Sasuke usually did he got right to the point.

"Hokage-sama I formally request permission to marry your daughter."

Hiashi looked at him in surprise. "I am very sorry Sasuke, but I am afraid that is not possible. She has been formally betrothed."

Sasuke frowned. "We have had conversations about her marrying me and forming an alliance between our clans. Now that Itachi is gone I am ready to begin repopulating my clan. Hinata is far and away the most desirable maiden in this village. Both in beauty and in blood she is the very best. It only makes sense that she should be mine."

Hiashi nodded a bit sadly. In many ways Sasuke was the ideal husband for his daughter. He was a powerful ninja with a great blood line and was well respected and liked by the whole village. Unfortunately Naruto had an edge in raw power, wealth, and even in prestige. "I *am* sorry Sasuke. But I am afraid I have found a better match for her. If you are willing to wait three years I would agree to a marriage between you and my daughter Hanabi."

Now Sasuke really did look surprised. He knew just how highly the Hokage thought of him. "Who could you possibly prefer to me?"

Hiashi sighed. "Namikaze Naruto."

That night the gates to the Namikaze estates were thrown wide open for the first time in over sixteen years. Since yesterday the rumors

had been flying about Naruto's return as well as the fact he was actually the Yondaime's son. The news that he had killed Itachi was generally not believed as it seemed even more incredible than his being the son of Namikaze Minato. The news that he had been seen with a strange and exotic beauty had also spread. A few of the council members such as Nara Shikaku were as curious about her as they were about Naruto.

They were not to be disappointed. Moka put her hair up and wore a magnificent gold silk kimono that depicted a sunrise. Despite her red eyes and fangs and aura of power people were willing to accept that these were due to an unusual kekkei genkai. She was charming and intelligent and did not fail to win people over.

Naruto was polite. He did not try to be warm or pretend to be especially open. He tried very hard to be correct and what he imagined people would expect him to be. Truthfully he had no use for the majority of the people who were flocking through his new home. Just like the ordinary villagers he despised the Council members for that they had done to him. *They* had denied to him the protection his name and heritage might have given. *They* had allowed him to be poor and miserable when they easily could have taken some of the money *that was his* and used it to provide for him. *They* had done nothing at all to help him. Sarutobi was the only one in power who had tried to do right by him.

But though he hated them he had to placate them. So long as the Hokage and the Council were ready to at least tolerate him that meant he would have a free hand when it came to dealing with the villagers. So he smiled a little and answered their idiotic questions about where he had been and what he had done. He gave people tours of the mansion and agreed to visit various clans in the near future. He made mind numbing small talk until he thought he would start screaming.

Throughout the evening well dressed servants wandered through with trays filled with expensive wines and more food. There was a vast wine cellar and Naruto had called in caterers to provide the

food. Despite being among the most powerful and elite of the ninja none of them seemed to notice that the 'servants' were all shadow clones disguised with henge. This was quite useful as people tended to forget about the servants, seeing them as almost extensions of the house. They would talk freely whenever Naruto and Moka were a safe distance away. Not thinking twice if a butler or maid happened to be standing near by.

He learned some interesting things. For one it seemed they all believed that he was the secret weapon that would lead them to victory over their enemies. Being powerful ninja they had all been required to serve in this war on the frontlines. They had *all* suffered losses over the last four years. There was not a single clan present that had not lost members. Even a couple clan heads had been killed as the leaders of Aburame and Yamanaka had been lost. The current clan heads were his own age. Shino seemed polite if rather quiet. Ino on the other hand had not forgotten their earlier run in and had been condescending and discourteous without ever quite stepping over the line into outright rudeness. Naruto made a mental note to ask Moka to try and make nice with her for him.

He also learned that despite appearances a good many of them were nervous about him. The older ones knew what was inside him and could remember that night sixteen years ago. They also kept mentioning someone named, 'Gaara.' Apparently this Gaara had been a Suna jinchurikki who'd also been something of a psychopath. He had enjoyed killing regardless of whether the victim was friend or foe. It seemed he'd murdered a great many Suna citizens and been feared by his own village as much as he'd been respected. He'd finally been captured and killed by Akatsuki, leading to celebrations in both Konoha and Suna. Most of his guests viewed him in a similar vein; he was a double edged sword.

Naruto smiled gleefully when he found out about this. So they half expected him to be a psychopath huh? That would be very useful.

As the evening wore on he excused himself and went to the bathroom, leaving for a short time without fanfare.

"Pardon me, Danzo-san?" Moka spoke to the old ninja with a warm smile.

"Yes?"

"My husband has found some interesting jutsu scrolls in our family library and was wondering if you would care to give your opinion on them. They seem to be about some sort of clan jutsu called the hirashin. Would you mind looking at them?"

Danzo nodded politely and revealed nothing of his thoughts. It was good that he did not believe in expressing emotions or something of his excitement might have shown through. The Hirashin had been the Yondaime's signature technique, the one that had made him the Yellow Flash of Konoha. So far as he knew only one copy of the jutsu existed and it was under heavy guard at the Tower. If it really was another copy of that jutsu and he could somehow convince Naruto to part with it even for just a short time... it opened some interesting possibilities.

"I would be happy to look at it and give my opinion."

"Arigato, Danzo-san." She placed an arm on his and began to lead him away from the party and up the stairs.

"It is right in here," Moka opened the door to the library and entered it with him.

Danzo was surprised to see two others already waiting. "Homura, Koharu, what are you doing here?" The two other Council members frowned at him.

"I was told there was a special vintage of wine I had to try," Homura answered.

"I was informed there was a unique piece of art that he wanted me to appraise." Koharu said.

A side door to the library opened and Naruto entered. "Please forgive my little deceits, they were necessary to bring each of you here without quarrel."

All three Council members frowned at him. "It is not wise to lie to members of the High Council," Koharu said frostily with every ounce of her dignity.

"Really?" Naruto said with a smile. "My sensei once taught me that deception was the life blood of a ninja."

"That is true on missions and when dealing with an enemy not here." Koharu said.

"I guess it all depends on who you see as the enemy." Naruto replied calmly. "In any case, I asked the three of you're here to show you an old order I have from the Third Hokage."

"What foolish game are you playing?" Danzo asked. "Why would we have any interest in one of Sarutobi's old orders?"

"Oh but it's a very special order, here have a look." He held the paper out to them. None of them made a move to take it from him.

"This has wasted enough of my time," an annoyed Homura told him.

"I quite agree," she looked at Naruto like an old sensei about to discipline her charge. "You need to learn proper behavior when dealing with your betters."

"My betters?" Naruto sounded amused. "And what makes you think you are better than me?"

"Even if you are the son of the Fourth, we three have been on the Council longer than you have drawn breath. We are among the most

respected and honored ninja of this village." Danzo stated. "We are not to be lied to or mocked even by one such as you."

"I see," Naruto said seriously. "Please forgive me for offending three such *honorable* people. But will you not read what I have here?"

"I am leaving," Koharu said with all her dignity. "Know that you have offended me and that I will inform others of this behavior." Homura and Danzo both nodded and moved for the door.

Naruto unfolded the letter and began to read it out loud. "By special order of the Third Hokage ANBU agent Uchiha Itachi is hereby instructed to execute all members of the Uchiha clan both ninja and civilian. Executions are authorized due to the crimes of treason and rebellion. Upon completion of this mission Uchiha Itachi is to be recognized as Uchiha clan head and will be authorized to establish a new clan loyal to the village of Konoha and its acting Hokage." Naruto looked up from his reading material and was not surprised to find the three, 'honorable' Council members frozen and looking at him in horror, even the stoic Danzo. "As I am sure you all know this order bears each of your signatures as well as the signature and seal of the Third Hokage. Given what was being required of him Itachi insisted on written orders, and that each of you sign so that you could not deny your part in the decision to massacre the Uchiha clan." He handed the paper to Danzo. "You can keep that it's just a copy, I have the original well hidden."

Danzo stared at him. "How did you get this?"

"Itachi gave it to me; he also told me your dirty little secret before he died. Sasuke wasn't supposed to survive was he? Itachi said he wanted to spare Sasuke and that the Third was willing, but that you three insisted that the entire clan had to die for their plan to launch a coup. But even though he was able to slaughter his own mom and dad he couldn't kill his little brother. So instead he spared Sasuke and fled the village as a missing nin. Now, what do you suppose would happen if I were to go down stairs and show everyone the original? How do you think Sasuke would react? Or the Hokage? Or

the other Council members? How would the village react to knowing the Uchiha massacre had been ordered by the village hierarchy?"

"No one would believe you!" Koharu said. "We would deny it. Who do you think they would believe?"

"Oh they would believe you except for the fact that the original bears the Hokage's seal. A simple ninjutsu will show the seal, and therefore the order, to be valid."

"If you implicate us you would also be implicating the Third Hokage." Danzo pointed out.

"If the old man were still alive I would keep my mouth shut," Naruto said. "But he's gone now, and I knew him well enough to know that he would accept the responsibility for the decision he made. Now what about you three?"

The three of them looked at each other.

"What do you want?" Danzo asked.

"Nothing much," Naruto said in a friendly tone. "I just want you three to serve me."

"Pardon me; you are Uchiha Sasuke, right?"

Sasuke turned around to find himself face to face with Naruto.

"That's me."

"Do you think I could have just a few minutes of your time? There's something I want to talk to you about. It's rather important."

Sasuke nodded. "Sure."

Naruto led him upstairs to his private study.

"You know I remember you from before." Sasuke said as soon as the door to the study closed.

Naruto nodded. "I remember you too."

"I thought you were an idiot." Sasuke said flatly.

Naruto chuckled. "That's o.k.; I thought you were an arrogant spoiled rich kid."

The two men faced one another silently.

"So what do you want?" Sasuke finally asked.

Naruto smiled. "I am here to fulfill your brother's last request."

Declarations of non love

Sasuke opened up his stance and half readied himself to be attacked. "Itachi's last request? What, are you going to try and finish the job of destroying the Uchiha clan?"

"No," Naruto answered. "It's nothing like that." Naruto then did something he never, ever imagined he would do. (Except possibly to Moka.)

A Few Days Earlier

Naruto had just heard the rather amazing tale of what lay behind the Uchiha massacre.

"You slaughtered your entire family because you were ordered to? You know I'm not the gentlest soul in the world, and even I think that's brutal. Did you really hate them?"

"Hate them?" Itachi shook his head. "Quite the opposite, I loved my family dearly, especially my parents and my little brother."

"Then, then how could you..." Naruto pictured Moka and Iruka. "I could **never** do that to someone I loved."

"Perhaps that makes you a better man than I am," Itachi said quietly. "But as hard as it was, I decided I loved my village more. But at the very last I found I could not kill my brother. He was completely innocent. So rather than harm Sasuke I instead convinced him that I had murdered the clan out of my own selfish desires. I then fled Konoha and became its most hatred and feared missing nin."

Itachi looked away for a moment.

"I had hoped he would become a loyal servant of Konoha, and love the village as I did. I intended to face him one day and allow him to

kill me. My hope was this would grant him peace of mind, and it would be a fitting punishment for my own actions. However when I was recruited into Akatsuki I realized what a threat they were, I felt I had no choice but to delay my own death in order to help Konoha deal with them. But now, unfortunately, I have run out of time."

"Do you want me to tell your brother the truth? That you were never a traitor?"

"No!" Itachi said sharply. "Sasuke must never learn the truth! If that were to happen he would hate Konoha! After I am dead let him hate me forever. That is for the best. But there are three powerful people on the village who know the truth and bear my clan a bitter grudge. In my robes you will find an old order with their signatures on it. With that you can make sure they will leave Sasuke be once they learn I am gone."

Naruto smiled a bit. *So I'll have blackmail material against three important people? Well that sounds interesting.* "I will definitely let them know to leave Sasuke alone."

"And please beg his forgiveness for me."

"Huh?"

"Please tell my brother that at the very end of my life I came to my senses. Tell him I sincerely regret what I did and that I beg forgiveness of him. I am sure he will never forgive me, but I cannot bear to die without knowing that he will at least have that much from me. I could not give him revenge, so all I have left is an apology. Will you do this for me?"

Naruto frowned. "I am not really good at begging forgiveness," he sighed. "But after what you've done for me I give you my word. I will beg Sasuke's forgiveness on your behalf."

Though he hated doing it Naruto did what he'd promised to. He fell down upon his knees and bowed his head. "On behalf of your brother Itachi I ask your forgiveness. At the very end of his life your brother realized what he's done and regretted it. He asked me to offer up a sincere apology to you and beg you to forgive him."

Sasuke stared down at him furiously. "Get up!" He screamed at him and hauled him back up to his feet. "Is this some kind of joke to you?!"

Naruto gave him a flat look. "It's no joke. It was your brother's last request and I chose to honor it. Now take your hands off me before you lose them."

Sasuke let go. "My brother was a monster and there can *never* be any forgiveness for what he did."

Naruto simply shrugged. "You're holding on to your hate. I can respect that."

Sasuke eyed him angrily. "Why would you honor the request of an enemy and someone you killed?"

"You can still respect someone even if they're an enemy, even if you have to kill them. Frankly I prefer a declared enemy to a false friend." Naruto turned to head back to the party. "Well I've done what I promised to."

"Wait a second," Sasuke grabbed his arm.

Naruto stopped and looked pointedly to where Sasuke's hand was grabbing him. "You are starting to seriously push your luck. Most people only get one warning from me."

"Hn," he let go but stared at him contemptuously. "Big talk from someone who isn't even technically a ninja yet."

Naruto smiled at him pleasantly. "I was still good enough to kill your brother though wasn't I?"

Sasuke glared at him. "I was supposed to be the one to do that. You robbed me of my life's ambition."

"Too fucking bad, life doesn't always give us what we want. Now get over it."

Sasuke was not used to being talked to like this. Even the Hokage and Jiraiya spoke to him with respect. Even if Naruto really was the son of the Fourth he had no business talking to him like that. "I hear you're going to marry Hyuuga Hinata." He said tightly.

"That's right," Naruto answered.

"I want her." Sasuke said. "I am more deserving of her than you could ever be."

Naruto looked at Sasuke for a moment. "Do you love her?"

Sasuke frowned. "Love has nothing to do with it. I need to rebuild my clan and she has the best blood."

"I see," he turned to leave again. "You really are a completely selfish bastard aren't you?"

Hinata arrived late and beautifully dressed. When she spotted Naruto her face began to darken and she immediately looked down. With his daughter now present the Hokage made his announcement of her betrothal to Naruto and stated that the wedding would be held in seven days. The news caught everyone but Jiraiya, Sasuke, Naruto and Moka by surprise. The gossip began immediately. Many wondered at the haste of the ceremony and questioned if Hinata might just have a bun in the oven. Most of the people there were unfamiliar with the Shodai's law of clan restoration which allowed for three wives. (Sasuke was the only other person to qualify under it

and he had never spoken about marriage.) Moka found besieged by a number of sympathetic women who were under the impression the announcement mean she was about to be divorced. She was placed in the embarrassing situation of having to explain that she was the first of three potential wives Naruto might have.

As this was going on Sasuke stood at the edge of the crowd and watched as Naruto whispered something to Hinata. The girl blushed again and nodded. Naruto took her hand and led her away. This did not go unnoticed and quite a few people were commenting that Naruto was getting an early start on things.

Moka noticed too of course, but surrounded as she was there was noting she could do.

As Sasuke stood in the background Ino found him.

"Sasuke-kun, I need to have a word with you."

"What is it?" He sounded as disinterested as ever.

Hearing his tone only confirmed her decision. "I just want to let you know that I've decided to start dating Shikamaru. I am tired of throwing myself at you only to be ignored. I am a beautiful and powerful independent woman and if you can't see that then it's your loss, so goodbye."

As she turned to storm off Sasuke grinned slightly. "Hey Ino?"

"What?" She looked back over her shoulder.

"Now that Itachi is dead I'm finally ready to begin repopulating my clan. I'm going to take three wives. You want to be one of them?"

She froze. "Wh... what?"

"You want to marry me?" He asked in an offhanded tone.

"Yes! Yes I do! Oh Sasuke-kun I'm so happy!" She ran into his arms and squeezed him tight. "I knew you would love me one day."

"I don't love you." His tone was not deliberately cruel but neither was it kind. He was simply stating a fact to her. "But I need three wives who can give me powerful children. I plan to make the Uchiha clan be the greatest in the village by time my life ends."

Ino looked up at him, her sudden joy tempered by his uncaring words. "Is that all I am to you Sasuke-kun? Someone to breed your children for you?"

"You'll have other duties as my wife, but that will be your most important one. You're beautiful, young, healthy, and most important have a kekkei genkai. If that's not good enough for you Ino there are plenty of other girls who qualify."

"No, I... I want to marry you Sasuke-kun." She hesitated only a bit. She had always dreamed of him falling in love with her. Obviously that was not going to happen. But she was still going to be the wife of the one and only Uchiha Sasuke, that was enough for her. "So what about Sakura?"

"What about her?"

"Well, is she going to be one of your other two wives?"

He snorted dismissively. "Don't be ridiculous, she doesn't have a kekkei genkai and is just a regular ninja. The children she'd give me would be nothing special."

Ino was both pleased and saddened to hear that. The two of them had been rivals over Sasuke since they were children. It pleased her to know that in the end she'd won. It saddened her because she knew what this was going to do to her best friend.

"So who else do you plan to marry?" Ino asked as she happily pressed herself against him.

Sasuke's first instinct was to push her away, he didn't like being held. But he checked himself; if she was really going to be his wife then he was going have to tolerate a certain amount of physical contact. "One will definitely be a Hyuuga." He left open whether that meant Hinata or her little sister. "As for my third wife I have someone in mind." Though Ino did not notice Sasuke glanced over to a small crowd.

In the middle of which stood a beautiful woman with silver hair and a powerful kekkei genkai. She would definitely be perfect.

Naruto closed the door to one of the many unused bedrooms in his mansion. "Thank you for agreeing to talk to me in private." Naruto said.

Looking very nervous Hinata nodded. "Ah, it's ah, fine Naruto-kun."

He looked at her and suddenly found himself unsure what to say. Even after all his experience dealing with Moka and the other girls back at the academy he could still have trouble dealing with girls he didn't really know well. So he did what he often did in this situation, he said the first thing to come to his mind.

"Do you love Sasuke?"

That caught her totally by surprise. "Wha... what? Sasuke?" She shook her head. "No, I don't love him. He's a very skilled ninja and I respect him. But unlike a lot of girls I've never liked him personally. He's very cold." She looked over to him shyly. "I... I like people who... who are warm."

"So does that mean that if you had the choice you would rather marry me?"

She slowly nodded. "Of course, you are the onl... only one I have ever really wanted to marry."

He looked at her in surprise. "Even after what I said to you at the academy?"

She nodded and looked down. "I know... know you don't like me and that... that you think I'm an idiot. But... but I still like you. I understand you're not the boy I had feelings for. But I still like you." She looked down at the floor and was afraid that he was going to call her an idiot again. So she was surprised to feel his hands tenderly take hold of hers.

"I am very sorry for being so cruel to you before Hinata-chan." She felt her face go completely red at hearing him call her Hinata-chan in such a caring tone. "I didn't do that just to hurt you, I thought it would be best for you to hate me since I wasn't going to marry you. But now things have changed."

He let go of one of her hands and carefully tipped her chin up so they could look into each other's faces.

"I know you have been forced into this as I have. So please believe that I am not going to be cruel to you. I am afraid I can't love you or be a real husband to you because my heart already belongs to someone else. But even if I can't be a genuine husband to you I'll try very hard to be a good friend. I promise that I won't let you be lonely. And... and if you want, we can at least do this."

He leaned forward and a stunned Hinata received her very first adult kiss.

Her heart began to pound and she felt her entire body grow hot. *Oh Naruto-kun!* She closed her eyes and immersed herself completely into his kiss.

Her father had explained the circumstances behind her betrothal. How Naruto had been more or less forced into it, and how it was nothing but a political union between two clans. She had come here tonight fully expecting to be treated with disdain. She had expected him to call her an idiot again or worse. Instead he was showing her

kindness and a warmth she had never expected to see from him. She understood that he was not in love with her, and might never be. But as the feelings from his kiss consumed her she thought she might be happy.

That night once the celebration had ended and everyone had gone home Naruto had dismissed his clones and gathered all their information.

"So," Moka said casually. "What did you, 'discuss' with Hinata?"

Naruto grinned at her. "Are you jealous?"

She lifted an eyebrow. "Do I have any reason to be?"

Chuckling he gave her a quick kiss. "Of course not, I just tried to reassure her that I was not going to treat her badly."

"Did you kiss her?"

"I sure did," he answered. "But you said it was all right didn't you?"

She nodded. "We need her to be at least somewhat on our side if she's going to be living with us. The last thing we need is a resentful person with the ability to see through walls. You can kiss her so long as you don't do it in front of me and so long as it doesn't go any further than that."

Naruto nodded, they had already discussed this. "So did you learn anything interesting playing hostess?"

"Sasuke and Ino decided to get married tonight on the spur of the moment." She frowned a bit. "He actually seemed very eager to get to know me."

"Did he now?" Naruto said suspiciously.

She grinned at him. "Jealous?"

"Do I have reason to be?"

She leaned in and gave him a long kiss. "No."

Laughing the two of them headed upstairs to bed.

A terrible enemy but an excellent friend

It was early morning. He was in the mansion's huge kitchen having some tea. The kitchen door swung open and Moka strolled in dressed in a robe. She noted he was already in his black ninja gear.

"You're up early; would you like me to make you some breakfast?"

"No thanks," he said. He gave her a slight grin. "Today Jiraiya is supposed to give me the graduation test so I can officially become a ninja. Then I'm supposed to start training with him and Sasuke."

"You don't care for Sasuke much do you?"

"Nope," Naruto answered. "When we were kids we both suffered tragedy. But unlike me the village loved Sasuke. He was the last of his clan and was constantly given special treatment and whatever he wanted. Now it's obvious he thinks he's entitled to whatever he wants."

Moka nodded her head, she knew the type. "He has a very high place within this village. But I'm sure one day he'll want something he can't have and be very shocked to discover his place is not as high as he thinks."

"He wanted Hinata; he actually told me he was more deserving of her."

"Really? And what did you say?"

"I asked her if he loved her. If he had told me yes I'd have talked to the Hokage about having her marry him instead. But he doesn't love her; he wants her because she has the best genes for giving him children."

"How romantic," she said dryly.

"He didn't even want her the way a man wants a woman. He just wanted her because she was the best and he thought he should have the best."

"I suppose he'll have to settle for Ino then."

Naruto chuckled. "I'm not sure *anyone* deserves that."

She smiled at him. "Are you sure you don't want breakfast?" He nodded as he sipped his tea. "Well I'm pretty hungry this morning." She leaned over and put her face by his neck. "You know you smell sooooo good Naruto-kun."

He smiled back at her. "Go ahead Moka-chan."

"Thank you beloved," she sank her teeth into his throat and drank her fill.

Arriving at the Ninja Academy brought back memories. He spotted an old swing that he could remember sitting on when he felt lonely. He looked at the building and felt a little nostalgic. He didn't hate this place. Sure, the kids had teased him and been mean to him, but it had been nothing compared to how the adults treated him. He had met Iruka here; he'd actually still had hopes. He had still believed he could make at least a few friends. Then his birthday had rolled around and he had *finally* had his eyes opened wide.

"Hello Naruto," Jiraiya called to him from academy entrance. "You nervous about the exam?"

"Terrified, much scarier than being attacked by Uchiha Itachi or knowing you're surrounded by monsters."

"Yeah, well I suppose you have been through more than an academy student. Just so you know though you will have to earn the rank of Genin. You'll be given the exact same test all the graduates are, if

you fail it you won't be allowed to train with me. Have you studied the bushin jutsu?"

" **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**" Fifty clones puffed into existence all around him. "Does that answer your question?"

Jiraiya stared at him. "Shadow clones! How did you learn such an advanced technique?"

Naruto shrugged and dismissed his clones. "It was in my family library."

"But it's a forbidden A-rank technique. Learning it would take even a skilled Jonin weeks, for someone without experience it should be impossible."

"It wasn't that hard," Naruto sounded a little annoyed. Even though he was playing a role he still didn't like it when people underestimated him. "It only took me a few hours to learn. Now can we please get on with it?"

"Sure," Jiraiya led him down the hall to where the scholastic part of the test would be given. He had no doubts Naruto would pass easily. *If he really did learn the Kage Bushin in just a few hours then he might be a real genius like his father. Damn it! Just how much did we lose with him?*

Moka was going through the various closets deciding what she would keep and what would go. The kimono she had worn last night had actually been part of Kushina's wardrobe. Apparently they had been the same size. Moka was not sure how in fashion the clothes were, but she liked them. She knew Naruto would be busy with his exam all morning and with training most of the afternoon. So she was rather surprised to hear the chimes that were the door bell.

She was even more surprised to see who it was when she answered it.

"Good morning," Sasuke said with a small smile. In his hands was a huge bouquet of red roses. He handed them to her. "These are for you. Please think of them as a welcoming gift."

"Thank you," she answered politely and immediately set the roses down. "I wasn't expecting visitors as I believe the gate was shut and locked."

"A closed gate is no barrier to a ninja, and I'm afraid I don't have your phone number so there was no way for me to call ahead."

"Naruto and I don't intend to give out our phone number to just anyone."

His smile did not falter for an instant. "Well I'm hoping to not be just anyone, I mean I am leader of the Uchiha clan and considered one of the elite ninja of this village. And since Naruto and I will be teammates I thought I should take the time to get to know you."

"I would like that Uchiha Sasuke," she said pleasantly. "I suggest you speak to my husband and we can arrange a time when we can all go out together. Perhaps you can invite your fiancé Ino as well."

"Actually, I was hoping to take some time to get to know just you. Could I come in?" He tried to slide past her only to have her block his way.

"No, you may not come in." She said flatly.

"I am just trying to be friendly," Sasuke sounded a bit hurt.

"I know what you are trying to do Uchiha Sasuke, and it is not appreciated. And just so you know you are nowhere near as charming as you might believe."

"A lot of ladies would disagree with you," he said smugly.

She lifted an eyebrow. "If that is true then I have a very low opinion of the ladies of this village."

He shook his head in disappointment. "It just so happens that I think you are an extraordinary woman and I would just like to get to know you a bit better."

Moka sent him a chill smile. "I am much more than just a woman, I also happen to be a wife, and it is completely inappropriate for you to come to my door with flowers asking to be alone with me."

"You're only just married though, right? If you just gave me a chance you might discover you'd found something better." With that he suddenly leaned in, intending to give her a surprise.

He was the one who got the surprise however as he never even saw her fist as it connected with his jaw. He found himself lying on his back on their front lawn. He was looking up a furious Moka with his flowers clutched in her fist.

"How dare you!" She threw his flowers back at him. "How dare you try and kiss me!"

Sasuke wiped a little bit of blood from his mouth and got up. She really was powerful. "I think you're making too big a deal out of it. I just wanted to give you a friendly little kiss. It was nothing major."

She glared at him and sent him all the killer intent she could muster. "Understand this Uchiha Sasuke, only one man has the right to kiss me and you are **not** him! I do not care if all the idiot women of this village worship the ground you walk on. To me you are despicable! You are not welcome in this house and if you ever attempt anything like this again I will kill you. And so you know Uchiha Sasuke, even if my beloved Naruto were somehow gone you would *still* be beneath my contempt. Know your place!" She stormed back into her home and slammed the door.

Sasuke stood there massaging his jaw. He had a grin despite the pain. *Now that's a woman worthy of me.*

"Congratulations Naruto, you are now officially a ninja of the Leaf." Jiraiya told him proudly. "This is yours now. You have the right to wear it." He handed Naruto his brand new hitai-ite. He remembered of course that the first time they'd met Naruto had been wearing one. He recalled how fiercely he'd defended his right to wear it even though he hadn't been a ninja.

"Thanks," Naruto muttered. He took the hitai-ite and shoved it into one of his pockets.

"Aren't you going to wear it for people to see?"

"Why bother? Everyone will know who the hell I am soon enough."

Jiraiya frowned. *He really has no love for this village at all. That damn seal is the only thing keeping him loyal.*

"Let's go godfather," Naruto called out. "If you're going to train me then start training me."

The training session had turned out to be a disappointment as for some reason Sasuke never showed up. Jiraiya did some light sparring with him but declined to show him any jutsus or work him really hard. In the end Jiraiya had called the session to an early halt and sent Naruto home.

"Where is this place you are wanting to take me?" Moka asked. Naruto had come home earlier than expected and asked her to go out to eat with him. He had a specific place in mind. Moka had decided not to tell him about Sasuke's visit. The two of them were trying not to keep secrets from one another, but she knew how Naruto might react to what Sasuke had done. From talking to people at the party the other night it was clear that Sasuke was a beloved figure in Konoha. (Why she could not imagine, but it was so.) If Naruto found out he had tried to kiss her he would probably kill

Sasuke. At the very least he would beat him to a bloody pulp. That would not help their situation.

"It's a little shop I used to eat at back when I was still living here. It's probably not even there anymore." Naruto said. "But I just want to see."

Moka didn't mind. If it was what her husband wanted it was fine with her. She noted they were traveling several miles from their estates. The area they were entering was clearly a rougher and poorer section of the village. As they went the people on the street stared at them and made it a point to stay clear. She could see groups of them muttering to themselves and glaring. No one seemed willing to say anything too loudly though. Moka sighed to herself, some things never changed. Even if she claimed she was a ninja with a blood line, people would treat her as a vampire.

"Well I'll be damned," Naruto chuckled. "It's still here." With her arm wrapped around his he lead her towards a little ramen shop with a sign that said, 'Ichiraku.'

Entering the familiar smells of ramen cooking brought Naruto back to some of the very few happy memories he had of Konoha. He saw that the delicious aroma was not the only thing that had remained the same. There was the same old counter with five stools and four little tables with simple wooden chairs beneath them. But best of all there were two familiar faces working behind the counter.

Smiling he bowed low to them, showing the two of them more respect than he would ever show to the Hokage or any one else from this village. "Teuchi-san and Ayame-chan, it is very good to see you again."

The old man working in the kitchen and the twenty something girl who was the waitress both stared at him. From the way he was dressed he was obviously a ninja. That was nothing unusual as the stand did good business with both the ninja and civilian populations. Being common workers though they were not used to having people

bow to them. They were also staring at the beautiful, but somehow frightening, woman standing beside him.

Ayame was staring at him but suddenly burst into laughter. "Naruto-kun? Is that you Naruto-kun?"

He smiled one of his rare honest smiles and rubbed the back of his head. "Heh, yeah it's me. I'm glad you remember me."

"How could I not remember my cutest and favorite customer?" She came out from behind the counter and gave him a hug. "What happened to you? We heard there was a fire at your apartment and that you'd gone away somewhere."

"That's right," Teuchi had come out of the kitchen. "We tried to find out where you were so we could write and make sure you were all right. But no one would tell us where you were. The old Hokage actually came by and asked us to stop trying to find where you'd gone."

Hearing that a couple people besides Iruka and the old man had cared about what happened to him gave Naruto a warm feeling. "Yeah, about that, I sort of had to leave the village and where I was, was a big secret. But if you want I can tell you a little bit about it."

Ayame looked at the strange woman who had been standing quietly at his side the entire time. "Naruto-kun who is this?"

"Oh sorry, let me introduce you. Moka-chan, this is Ayame-chan and Teuchi-san. They're two of the nicest people in this whole village. This was the only place I was allowed to eat at and they never once overcharged me, they even gave me a free meal every once in awhile. If everyone in the village had been like them I would have loved this place. Ayame-chan and Teuchi-san this beautiful and amazing woman, who I don't deserve, is my wife Moka."

Moka nodded politely to the two of them. "I am honored to meet you both. If my husband considers you friends then I will as well."

Teuchi and Ayame both gave her slight bows in return.

"Naruto I am so happy that you have someone to take care of you now," Ayame said pleased. She looked at Moka. "So you are really Uzumaki Moka?"

"I was," Moka answered. "But currently my name is Namikaze Moka."

"Namikaze?" Ayame whispered. She and her father both stared at Naruto. "No, no way, Naruto-kun *you're* Namikaze Naruto! You're the Yondaime's son?!"

Feeling embarrassed he began to rub the back of his head. "Yeah, I am, I didn't know growing up. I only found out about it recently."

"Should I call you Naruto-sama?" Ayame asked.

"No! Please don't! You and your father are very precious people to me. I would much rather you call me Naruto-kun." He looked a little embarrassed. "You know I'm kind of hungry."

Teuchi laughed. "Good to see you still have an appetite for ramen; I'll make some extra special ramen for you and your bride. It's on the house to celebrate your return."

If it was possible the ramen was even better than he'd remembered. He devoured three huge bowls while he regaled Teuchi and Ayame with stories about his life outside the village. He made sure the stories lacked specifics and were not on topics that could be dangerous to him.

Moka had a single bowl and mostly sat back and watched as Naruto enjoyed himself. Last night he had been surrounded by the village elite and had endured it as best he could. Now sitting in a dingy little shop with a couple working class people he was totally at ease and

comfortable. *All he needs is to be with people who care about him and he is happy.*

At the end of the evening Naruto left ten thousand ryo on the counter. The meal had been free so it had just been a tip.

"You are both precious people to me," he told them before leaving. "You are welcome to visit me at my home anytime you like. Please consider yourselves to be under my protection, if you ever need anything just come and ask me." He smiled at them. "I am a terrible enemy, but an excellent friend."

It was already dark as the two of them headed back. There was little crime in Konoha, but even if the neighborhood they were walking through had been a war zone they would not have been worried. For Naruto visiting Ichiraku's had been the highlight of the day. Certainly it had been far more important to him that receiving his hitai-ite from Jiraiya. Sitting at the stool and scarfing down that delicious ramen while Ayame and Teuchi watched had felt nostalgic. It had brought back some of the good memories of childhood.

"Get the hell out you damn demon!"

Naruto came to an immediate halt bringing Moka up as well. Across the street from them was a crowd of perhaps ten or twelve people. All of them were glaring over at them. Standing a little in front of the others was a tall bulky man dressed in denim overalls and with more grey in his hair than black. He was plainly a working man and his thick arms and chest suggested a life filled with hard manual labor. He looked like a man who was not afraid of much.

"You damn demon! We know what you are! Get the hell out of our village!" The group behind him all nodded their assent and shouted agreement.

Seeing this Moka frowned. "I am sorry Naruto-kun, it seems my being a vampire is causing you trouble."

"It's not you," he said in an eerily calm voice.

"What do you mean?"

"They're talking about me. I recognize the look. It's how all these damn villagers used to look at me, usually right before they started to beat me or throw rocks at me." This reminded him of his childhood too. He carefully disentangled his arm from hers. "Please wait right here Moka-chan and don't interrupt. I want to deal with them."

She was suddenly alert. "Naruto-kun," she asked nervously. "What are you going to do?"

"Something I've wanted to do since my eighth birthday."

He began to slowly cross the street. Despite the mounting rage he felt he was careful not to unleash any killer intent or draw out his demonic aura. He was in his human form. "What did you call me just now?" He asked in a calm voice.

The fact that he was walking towards them suddenly seemed to make the crowd a bit nervous. Perhaps they'd expected him to run away or try and ignore them. Obviously they hadn't expected this.

Their apparent leader looked around a bit, abruptly not looking quite so sure of himself.

"I asked you a question," Naruto repeated himself in that same calm tone, still just walking towards them. "What did you call me?"

The big man in the work clothes gathered himself. "I said you're a damn demon."

Naruto came to a stop about five feet in front of him. He was still completely human and in control of his killer intent and power. The man in front of him was about half a foot taller and maybe a hundred or so pounds heavier, with most of that being muscle. "Do you really

believe that? That I'm a demon walking this earth?" He stared up into the man's grey eyes with his dark blue ones.

"That's right, I... I know what you are." Despite his words the man backed up a couple of steps. The people behind him were starting to look very pale and nervous and were eyeing every direction as though looking for the best escape route.

"Well then, if you really do think that I'm demon why would you mock me and draw my attention? Does that seem like a smart thing to do?"

The large man just stared at him. It was pretty obvious that he had never considered that. "Uh..."

Naruto smiled, and the sight of his smile made all of them cringe and back further away from him. "You know, if I really was a demon I'd go ahead and just kill the whole lot of you."

"You can't do that!" A woman in the crowd cried out.

Naruto looked at her. "Why not?"

"We're all citizens of Konoha! You aren't allowed to hurt us!"

"It's against the law!" A man in the crowd agreed.

"And why would a demon like me give a fuck about human law?" Naruto asked reasonably.

"You're a ninja! You have to obey the laws of the village!" The same man pleaded.

"Oh, so now I'm a ninja? I thought I was a demon." He shook his head mockingly. "You don't get to have it both ways. You don't get to call me a demon and treat me like a demon, but then expect me not act like a demon. So you know what you worthless pieces of shit? Since you want to treat me like a demon I'll just have to be one."

And he unleashed it all at once. He let them feel the full force of his killer intent as he was surrounded by his three tail cloak and transformed into his youkai kitsune figure.

That was it, they all began to scream and run.

They didn't get far.

"I'll show you a demon!" Naruto unleashed his flames in a wide sweeping arc. They splashed and caught the people trying to get away from him. The men and women screamed as they began to burn. Naruto stood there and watched, all the while smiling.

Moka came to his side. She did not care about the people he had just slaughtered. She cared only about his safety and position within the village. "Naruto-kun," she whispered. "What have you done?"

He was still smiling. "I've started."

Starting down a dark path

A two man ANBU squad landed on the scene less than a minute later. Already there were people on the street staring at the still burning corpses. The moment the masked ninja arrived people started babbling at them about what had happened. The words, 'demon' and 'Kyuubi' were most often repeated. One old man was screaming that the village was doomed and that the Kyuubi had returned to destroy them for their sins. Some of the frightened people yelled at the man to shut up.

One of the ANBU had a mask resembling an owl, the other a cat. Since there were obviously no survivors the two of them drew away from the gathering multitude to have a quick conversation.

"It was *him* wasn't it?" Owl said sounding a bit nervous.

"You felt his chakra the same as I did. Who else could have that kind of chakra?" Cat replied.

"Then what do we do?" Owl asked.

Cat turned north in the general direction of the Tower and where most of the clan estates were located. Including the Namikaze estates. He had no trouble sensing where that immense chakra was now. For every ninja in the village it was like a signal fire blazing away. "He is probably gone home. We have to contain him for right now. We'll need to call in every available agent."

"Then what?" Owl asked.

"Then the Hokage will decide what's to be done." Cat said.

"What if he orders us to capture him?" Owl sounded very nervous.

"Then we'll carry out the order," Cat looked at him from beneath his mask. "We are the personal weapons of the Hokage. We will carry

out his orders whatever they might be."

Naruto stood on top of the roof of his mansion. He was in his vampiric form now with four tails swinging above his head. He could hold more demonic energy for far longer in this form. And even if he could not use jutsus he had other powers at his disposal. He knew of course that the ninja of the village would have no trouble sensing him. He was sending them all a blunt message. *I'm right here. Come and get me if you want.* Before changing into a vampire he'd created a couple hundred shadow clones and posted them all along the perimeter of the estates. If anyone came over the fence he would know immediately and they would have a fight on their hands.

Moka appeared by his side looking very unhappy. "Naruto-kun," she was trying to sound patient. "You know as much as I love you I don't understand you at times. I know they were insulting you, but did you have to kill them just for that? Couldn't you have been satisfied with just beating them?"

He slowly shook his head. "No, beating them wouldn't be near enough." He seemed to be staring out into the village. "Can you feel them? Surrounding us?"

She nodded. "There are at least a hundred."

"Yeah, it might be all the ANBU in the village." He looked at the watch on his wrist. "And they managed to get here in such numbers in just under five minutes, their performance has really improved." He chuckled wryly. "All the ANBU who used to be tasked with protecting me when I was growing up were always slow for some reason. They would show up only *after* people had started beating on me, and then they would just tell them to stop and take me to the hospital if my wounds required it. They never arrested any of the wonderful citizens of Konoha or even touched them. But I guess, in their own way, they were carrying out Sarutobi's orders to protect me. But now a hundred of them managed to get organized and get

here in just a few minutes after some of the precious villagers were attacked."

"Naruto-kun," she said urgently. "I know you hate them. But why did you do it? Why now? I thought you wanted to stay here and be accepted until the time came. Why did you do something so rash?"

He looked to her and smiled. "It wasn't rash Moka-chan, I admit I was very angry, but it had *always* been my intention to start killing these damn villagers while I built up my strength. Long before I'm ready to take my final revenge these villagers will look at me like I *really* am a demon. I'll make them fear me. I'll make them fear me so much they won't even *dare* look in my direction. I'll make them piss their damn pants every time they see me. The leaders of the village half expect me to be a psychopath anyway, like that Gaara guy. And I told the Hokage right from the start I wouldn't tolerate any sort of insult from people. He agreed to let me deal with it as I saw fit. So I'm going to kill these fucking villagers as I please."

"Won't that make the entire village hate you?"

He laughed. "The entire village *already* hates me! Let them! But I'll make them fear me even more!" He said happily. He looked at her and smiled. "Moka-chan, would you like to hear what happened on my eighth birthday?"

She shrugged, not seeing what this had to do with their current situation. "Certainly Naruto-kun."

"Now, I've already told you how the Kyuubi attacked the village the night I was born, October tenth right?"

"Yes, you've told me."

"An awful lot happened on that night. Hundreds of brave ninja died trying to hold back the Kyuubi, I was born, my mother died, my dad, the great hero of the village, sacrificed himself to defeat the Kyuubi and trap him inside of me, thus dooming me but saving the village.

Feelings were very high, and most people had no mercy in their hearts for a newborn orphan. Most of them only cared that the Kyuubi was inside me and wanted me killed. But Sarutobi had reclaimed the position of Hokage and not only saved me but passed a law he thought would give me a chance at a normal life. No one who knew the truth of the Kyuubi was permitted to speak of it. Penalty for breaking this law was immediate execution. Just about everyone in the village was against letting me survive, but the word of the Hokage was law and the obedience of the ninja and especially the ANBU (at least to the letter of that law) was absolute. So because of Sarutobi alone I was allowed to survive."

"I see," Moka said sadly. She hadn't quite realized how *completely* alone he'd been.

"I was allowed to survive, but that was about all. From my earliest memories almost everyone I met hated me. It was only a question of how much they hated me. Most people settled for just glaring at me. Some cursed and screamed at me for, what I thought, was no reason. And some took out their fury with sticks, stones, beer bottles, garbage, and fists. Even the people who were supposedly my caretakers hated me; the best I could hope for was that they would tolerate me. But love? Affection? Friendship?" He shook his head. "Those were just words to me. Sarutobi would drop in to check on me when he could, and he was always kind and protective, but he was busy and couldn't do it very often. And do you know the worst part of it?"

"No, what?"

"The worst part was I never knew *why* everyone hated me. When they would beat me I would ask them, the only answer I ever got were shouts that I was a demon or a monster or that I deserved it. I didn't understand. I figured it had to be something I'd done for everyone to hate me. I wanted to fix it, I wanted to make all that hate go away, but there was never anything I could do. Every day was a struggle just to survive, but one day was worse than any other. October tenth, the anniversary of the Kyuubi's defeat was celebrated

every year with a massive festival and a great parade that would snake its way through the village and end at the Yondaime's shrine, where the whole village would make offering in his memory. There was feasting and drinking and at night there would be a huge fireworks display. But I never got to enjoy any of it." He laughed dryly. "Because for some odd reason all that hatred people had for me would be a hundred times worse than on any other day. It was my birthday but I came to really hate October tenth. I would barricade myself into my apartment and just pray that I would be left alone."

"So that's why you didn't want to celebrate your birthday," Moka said sadly.

Naruto nodded. "On my eighth birthday I was alone like always when I heard a whole bunch of angry shouts coming from outside my door. Before I knew it people were breaking it down. I hid underneath my bed, but they quickly found me and dragged me out from under it." Despite being a vampire and surrounded by massive amounts of power he looked frightened and actually shivered. "They'd brought cans of gasoline with them and rope. They'd come *prepared*. They tied me up and poured the gasoline all over me, they even poured it into my mouth. I knew what they were going to do and I screamed for help. I had an ANBU escort at all times, but I guess they didn't notice the twenty or thirty people in my apartment or the fact I was screaming. No one came to save me. I begged them not to do it, I pleaded, I promised to be a good boy and do anything if they would just stop. Do you know what they said to me just before they dropped the match?"

Moka couldn't find her voice; she could only shake her head.

"The one with the match looked right at me and said, 'you deserve this.' Then he lit me on fire." He stared out into the night. "I should have died, there was no last second rescue, no way I could get away. "I was in the middle of a gasoline inferno, I breathed fire, I saw my skin turn black and fall off. I felt a pain like you couldn't believe, it was so intense I couldn't even think. All I could do was wish to die.

But the joke was on them, the Kyuubi wouldn't let me die. No matter how I burned, no matter how I suffered the flesh grew back to burn again. I burned and burned and burned, but I wouldn't die. Finally, mercifully I passed out. When I woke up again I was in Konoha hospital under a heavy ANBU guard. I was in pain and wrapped up like a mummy with tubes sticking out of me, but I was alive." He looked at his wife. "And that's why I killed them tonight. That's why I'll kill them all one day. Because any village that can produce people who would do that to a helpless child deserves no mercy. They deserve only to die in flames."

She reached out and put her arms around him. "You're right beloved, that is just what they deserve." She squeezed him tight. "And they call *us* monsters?"

The two of them stood there quietly for awhile. Finally Moka asked him something.

"What happens now Naruto-kun?"

"One of two things," he said calmly. "The Hokage will either accept my actions or he will not. If he accepts them then I expect I will get a message from him to report to the Tower tomorrow. He will condemn what I did and try to reassert his authority over me. He may even, 'punish' me with my chest seal. But he'll accept that I can do whatever I want with the civilians, just so long as I obey him. If on the other hand he decides he can't tolerate a murdering jinchurikki then he'll order an ANBU assault some time tonight with Jiraiya leading it. They'll try to either arrest or kill me."

"What do we do if it's the latter?" Moka asked. She sounded only a little concerned.

"Then we'll kill as many of them as we can, including my dear godfather, before we run away. We can't beat the entire village or even the entire ANBU, but we'll give them something to remember us by. At least until I'm strong enough to return and finish things."

"What do you think the chances are of that actually happening?"

He shrugged. "Probably no more than one in ten, he's got too many plans for me, and I'm sure he considers the civilian population to be expendable. But some of his advisors might feel differently."

"He must be arrested for this; there can be no question about it!" The normally quiet Nara Shikaku spoke vehemently. "Have we become Suna?" Shikaku demanded. "Is he to be our Gaara going around terrorizing people? He must be held accountable for his actions!"

"I agree," Akimichi Choza stood up in support of his long time friend and teammate.

"It is only logical that Naruto be held answerable under the law." Aburame Shino said in his usual emotionless voice.

Danzo glanced at Homura and Koharu. "Arresting Naruto might be a mistake; we cannot know the details of what happened. He was nearly killed by the civilian population once before. Can we be certain he did not act in self defense?"

Shikaku gawked at him. "Is that a joke? He massacred a dozen unarmed civilians! What sort of threat could they have possibly been to him? Whatever his reasons he must be arrested and made to stand trial. He must be treated like any other ninja."

"The only problem with that is that he's not." Jiraiya said morosely. He was technically not a member of the Council but the Hokage had asked him to attend this emergency meeting. "Whether we like it or not he's a special case. You can't pretend he's just another ninja."

Danzo nodded his support. "He is our ultimate weapon, and the key to victory in our war. Do you really expect us to put him on trial? Do you really believe we can just put him in a cell?"

"Then what?" Shikaku demanded. "We just let him go around slaughtering people?" He looked about at the Council members. "This is Konoha. Have we really become just like our enemies?"

"Speak for yourself," Inuzuka Tsume barked at him. Her personality had really changed since she'd lost her son in the war. She had grown bitter and rarely smiled or laughed anymore. "I want to see Suna and Sound burned to the ground. If the only way to do that is with Naruto then I say we leave him the hell alone."

Shikaku frowned; he'd hoped to have her on his side. He looked around to try and find another ally. "Sasuke what do you think?"

Sasuke grinned just slightly. "I say Naruto definitely needs to be arrested and put on trial. It's the only honorable thing to do."

Yamanaka Ino immediately jumped up. "I agree with Sasuke-kun! Naruto needs to be put on trial!"

"There will be no arrest and there will be no trial." The Hokage spoke firmly. "I thank you all for your opinions, but I have made my decision. Naruto is indeed our secret weapon and the key to ending this bloody stalemate of a war. For the greater good, for the sake not only of victory but of peace, I have decided to grant Naruto extraordinary latitude. So long as he serves Konoha and carries out my orders I will not permit him to be arrested for *any* crime he commits in this village."

Shikaku looked at his supreme leader with real disappointment. *Sarutobi and Minato would never have felt that way.* "Hokage-sama, I beg you to reconsider. Once you start down this road it will be impossible to change directions later. Those twelve civilians who were killed tonight? They're just the beginning. If you permit this then there will be blood in our streets."

"And how much *ninja* blood has been spilled in this war already?" Danzo asked, pragmatic as ever. "If some civilians die to keep Naruto satisfied and loyal then their deaths are not wasted, they can

be counted as casualties in this war. Their sacrifice will help bring us eventual victory."

Shikaku stared at him, disgusted that he could be so cavalier about the lives of their citizens. "Aren't we sworn to protect the people of our village?"

"Our duty is to protect and defend Konoha, it is some times necessary to sacrifice a part in order to protect the whole." Danzo said.

"Enough," Hiashi said wearily. "Shikaku, I thank you for your opinion and the beliefs that I know you hold dear. But my decision is made."

Shikaku frowned, but there was nothing more he could do. *I truly fear where this path will take us.*

On the roof top Naruto smiled and suddenly and let his chakra cloak go. He gave his wife a kiss. "It's over, we can relax. An ANBU went up to the gate and told one of my clones the Hokage wants to meet with me early tomorrow morning."

Moka nodded in relief. "They're leaving," she could sense the chakra signatures from the other ninja begin to depart. "You've won."

He nodded. "This is just the beginning Moka-chan, I'll never stop. Not until I have paid them back everything I owe them."

Know your place

The meeting with the Hokage actually went better than he'd expected. While the Hokage made a point of telling him he was, 'deeply concerned' by the previous night's events, and went on to say such behavior was, 'unacceptable' Naruto noted what was **not** said. Iruka had told him long ago that a ninja had to look underneath the underneath and notice not only the things that were present but the things that were missing. The Hokage did not mention or even hint at any sort of punishment for his actions. He did not threaten any action should something similar happen in the future. What the Hokage did say was...

"I feel my main responsibility is to care for the welfare of the village as a whole and the ninja who guard and protect it. Were anything to happen to the ninja who serve this village I would be quite upset." The Hokage eyed him warily. "Do I make myself clear?"

With a slight smile Naruto gave the man a deep bow. "Hokage-sama I think I understand you perfectly."

Jiraiya was there waiting for him outside the Hokage's office. He did not look happy.

"You proud of yourself?" Jiraiya asked in a gruff voice.

"Proud?" He thought about it. "No. Happy? Yes."

"Tell me something, what the hell were you thinking?"

"Well godfather, I was thinking I wasn't going to take any more crap from these pathetic villagers. They need to understand that if they want to abuse me they'll regret it."

"And just how were they any sort of threat to you?"

He smiled coldly. "They were about as much a threat to me as I was to them when I was a kid."

"Damn it Naruto," Jiraiya growled. "This was your chance to start all over again! In time people might have seen you as Namikaze Naruto, son of the Yondaime and hero of the village. Now they're only going to see you as a threat. Couldn't you forget the past and just start over?"

Naruto looked at him with that frosty smile of his. "Forget the past?" He said in a cheerful voice. "Oh I bet you'd just love that wouldn't you godfather? Then we could just pretend you hadn't abandoned me for all those years. I'm not forgetting anything, why should I? When the villagers used to abuse me they did it because they had the power to, and because they knew they wouldn't be punished. Well guess what? Now I'm the one with the power. I'm the one with impunity. And I intend to show the villagers about as much mercy as they showed me."

"You do that and they will never forgive you." Jiraiya said sadly.

Naruto looked at him in surprise. "What makes you think I want forgiveness?"

Before setting out for the day Naruto had dispelled his shadow clones and made two hundred new ones. He'd explained to Moka that from now on he would leave them to secure the perimeter and give her any help she needed with the mansion. And if she needed to get a message to him all she had to do was tell a clone and then have him dispel. So Naruto had effectively secured the mansion for her.

So she was rather surprised when for the second time in as many days the door bell rang unexpectedly. Opening the door she was again surprised to see who it was.

"Hinata? What are you doing here?"

"Please pardon me if I am intruding, but I heard what happened yesterday and I was hoping to talk to Naruto about it. His clones told me he'll be back some time this afternoon. Do you think I could wait for him?"

"Of course, won't you come in?" She stepped aside and Hinata nervously entered. "And while you're here why don't you and I have a little chat?"

Jiraiya led Naruto to training ground seven where Sasuke was waiting.

"Since you still need to learn more jutsus I want you and Sasuke to just spar with one another. Just pure taijutsu, let me see how you match up." Jiraiya told them.

Sasuke smirked over at his new teammate. Naruto was obviously a terror when facing civilians. But Sasuke had no doubt who the most powerful ninja was. He took up a fighting stance. "You know Naruto; this is going to be pretty boring. What do you say we make this spar a little more interesting?"

Naruto snapped into his own fighting stance. "What do you have in mind?"

"How about a little bet on who wins this spar?"

Naruto shrugged. "Fine, how much do you want to bet?"

"Not money," Sasuke told him. "Something much more valuable."

"What?"

Sasuke's smirk turned into a grin. "If you win I'll get Ino to spend the night with you, but if I win I get to spend the night with your lovely wife."

Naruto stared at him. "No bet asshole," he growled.

"Heh, what's the matter? You afraid you're going to lose?"

"No you prick, I don't have any doubts I'm going to kick your ass. But there are three reasons why I'm saying no."

"You mind sharing them?" Sasuke teased.

"One, even if I think there's only a one in a thousand chance you could beat me that's still a chance. I would **never** let Moka be with another guy. Two, if Moka ever heard I made a bet where she was the stake she would kill me." The way he said that made Sasuke think he meant it literally. "And three," Naruto wore a look of distaste. "I've met Ino."

Sasuke chuckled. "Well you've got me there."

"You know Sasuke; I don't like having guys even think about Moka that way. And you've got real guts to come right out and tell me you want to sleep with my wife."

"Well what do you expect, she's quite the beauty."

"Yeah, she is, and if you ever touch her I'll kill you." Naruto said with total conviction. "That's a promise."

"I'm not some helpless civilian," Sasuke pointed out smugly. "I'm one of the most powerful ninja in the whole village. You really think you could take me?"

Naruto gave him a frosty smile. "I killed Itachi, how tough could his little brother be?"

Sasuke glared at him in sudden resentment, his right hand began to twitch a bit.

Jiraiya shook his head. *So much for trying to build camaraderie between them.* "All right, let's start."

The two of them went at each other with everything they had.

Hinata was seated at the head of the long dining table as Moka came out of the kitchen holding a silver tray. "Would you like sugar or milk with your tea?" She asked

"Two spoonfuls of sugar please."

Nodding Moka put in the sugar and stirred it before handing her the small cup. Moka poured herself some tea as well before sitting down across from her guest. She added nothing to hers. "I see you like sweet things; I like things that are strong myself."

Hinata nodded. "Some things can be both at once."

"True," Moka took a sip of hers. "I take it you wanted to talk about Naruto and what happened yesterday?"

"Yes," Hinata answered warily. "Is it really true that he killed a dozen people in cold blood?"

Moka nodded without concern. "It certainly is, I was there with him when it happened."

"But why did he do it?" Hinata asked plaintively. "Were they attacking him?"

"No, they were just insulting him."

Hinata looked at her in undisguised surprise. "Is that all? They insulted him and he killed twelve people just for that?"

"I wouldn't expect you to understand," she took another sip of her tea. "When he was a child Naruto suffered endless abuse at the hands of the villagers. Now that he has power he does not intend to suffer anything from them."

"But surely he doesn't need to kill people just to make them stop insulting him!"

"You don't understand," Moka said firmly. "These villagers deserve nothing better at his hands. Given how they treated him I think my husband has every right to do as he sees fit with them."

"But there are laws..."

"Those laws were not enforced when Naruto was the victim, why should they be enforced now?"

Hinata stared at her. She had grown up in a strict household where every rule was to be obeyed without question. She had been brought up to believe that obedience to the law was the mark of a civilized person. Likewise she had always thought that people who simply disregarded the law were barbaric and criminal. She was not sure how to explain this without giving offense.

Moka eyed her carefully. "You find it hard to believe that Naruto could do such a thing don't you?"

Hinata nodded. "The Naruto I remember was never cruel. I can't believe he would really do such a thing."

"From talking to you and a few others like Sasuke and Ino I gather that my husband was seen as something of an idiot when he was a child."

Hinata looked embarrassed. "I *never* saw him that way, but I admit that others did."

"Well, I never knew him as a child; I've only known him as a man. Whatever image you have in your mind of him you should forget. Open your eyes wide and see what he truly is."

"What is he?" Hinata asked a little nervously.

"He is a very strong man with equally strong passions. He loves and hates with equal fervor and commitment. If you are precious to him there is nothing he will not do for you. Likewise, if you are his enemy he will never stop until he has destroyed you."

"But the people of this village are not his enemies!"

"They are," Moka said firmly. "You had best understand that right now Hinata. This was not a one time incident. More villagers will die at his hands; have no doubts at all about that. He intends to have the villagers know their place. I also think it would be good for you to know your place as well." She took another sip of tea.

"My place?" Hinata replied nervously.

Moka set her cup down and looked at Hinata with her red eyes.

"Unlike your father you seem to be a kind person and I hope we can be friends. Naruto wants that and I would like it as well. But I believe it is best if you understand your position. I am the one he loves. I am his one and only. Naruto may give you kisses and show you kindness, but he will never warm your bed and he will never love you."

Hinata turned a deep red. "That's, I, I... uh what I mean is..."

Moka understood perfectly. "You have some secret hope that he will love you some day don't you?"

She looked down, unwilling to meet Moka's gaze. "Maybe, just a little," she answered softly.

"I've heard that you Hyuuga are expert at reading body language and telling when others are lying. Is that so?"

Hinata nodded slightly. "Yes, most of the time."

"Then please look at me while I speak so that you can know I am only speaking the truth." She paused while Hinata lifted her gaze.

"Naruto only agreed to this marriage because I thought it would be a good idea and a way to improve his position. He only kisses you because I told him it would be all right. Likewise if I asked him to never speak to you again he would do so. Naruto and I share a love and a bond so strong that *nothing* short of death will ever end it. We have fought for each other, comforted each other, loved each other, wounded each other, forgiven each other, and risked everything for each other. I understand his heart and his pain in a way that you never could, for it is a reflection of my own. He has told me that I am everything that he needs, just as he is everything I need. I will never love anyone else but him. His heart belongs to me, and I will never share it with another. You will never be anything more than a dear friend. He will never love you." She stopped and looked at the other girl keenly. "Now tell me, was anything I said to you a lie?"

She looked down again. "No," she said sadly. She rose to her feet. "If you'll excuse me I think I'll go now."

"Of course," Moka rose as well and began walking her towards the door. "I do truly want us to be friends Hinata."

She looked at her and nodded. "I'd like that too."

"Do you still want to marry him?" Moka asked quietly. She was not really surprised to see Hinata nod.

"Yes I do, I want to be with Naruto-kun. Even if it's only as a dear friend."

The spar had been a major disappointment. Fighting him in his human form without drawing any demonic power it had been a draw. Though of course Sasuke had been furious about it and sworn up and down that if he'd used his sharingan he'd have won. Naruto smirked at that. If Sasuke's sharingan were anything like Itachi's he'd be a real threat. Fortunately from what he'd heard Sasuke's was far weaker and he lacked the ability to draw people into the nightmare realm. But oh, had Sasuke ever been pissed off to find that on

straight taijutsu the two of them seemed evenly matched. *The bastard only did that well because I was forced to stay in human form and not draw on my power.* Naruto thought. *If I really went all out I'd slaughter him.*

An ANBU in mask and armor leapt in front of him. Naruto came to a halt.

The ANBU gave him a slight bow. "Greetings Naruto-sama, my commander would like a word with you in private."

Naruto nodded, going home would have to wait awhile. "Lead the way."

In a small underground chamber the ANBU took him to where a frowning Danzo awaited him. On a small table was a stack of manila folders.

"I have what you requested Naruto." Danzo told him in a flat voice. "Here are personnel files on every ninja of the village who is of Chunin rank or higher. I have also included dossier files on all the clans including all known members and jutsus. In addition I had the minutes of last night's emergency meeting copied; they should give you a good idea of the feelings of the clans regarding you."

Naruto glanced at the ANBU agent who was still standing right beside him.

"You do not need to worry about him. Just as you trust your wife I trust my protégé."

"Funny, you didn't strike me as the type to trust anyone." Naruto went over to the table and began to shuffle through the files. "This will be a major help."

"You should know fulfilling your request was very difficult." Danzo said stiffly.

Naruto looked up from the files and smiled. "It wasn't a request; it was a fucking order, like anything else I tell you to do."

"Please do not speak so disrespectfully to Danzo-sama," the ANBU said in a pleasant voice.

Naruto spared him a quick glance. "Shut up or I'll kill you."

"That would not be wise," Danzo said calmly. "Did the Hokage not inform you that you are strictly forbidden to harm the ninja of this village?"

Naruto frowned. "Not in so many words, but yeah."

"Do you intend to follow the Hokage's instruction?"

"For now," he turned back to the files. "Now where is that special file I asked you about?"

Danzo handed him a folder that looked no different from any of the others. "Here."

Naruto opened it eagerly. Looking through it he smiled. "Fukashi," he spoke the name and seemed to savor. "So he's still in the ANBU. He's married with four children, aw how sweet. Remind me to send flowers." He handed the file back to Danzo. "I want him delivered to me alive."

Danzo frowned. "I would think you would want to deal with him personally."

"Oh I do, I do! But it's too dangerous for me to do it. If I go after and an ANBU it's much too likely I'll be found out. That would be bad considering the Hokage just got done telling me to play nice with all the other ninja. I'll need your Root members to capture him for me, and he has to be alive."

Danzo shook his head. "What you ask is too difficult. Capturing an ANBU within the village without leaving a trace? Impossible, even for

my people."

"Make it possible." Naruto said with a hint of anger.

"Your emotions are a great weakness." Danzo told him.

"No, my hatred has been a constant source of strength for me. Now I want Fukashi and I mean to have him. Otherwise your dirty little secret will get out."

"It may be possible to capture him without suspicion if he is outside the village." Danzo admitted. "But he is not a member of my organization. It may take time to arrange things so that no one will suspect he was captured by us."

Naruto shrugged. "Take your time; I can be patient when I need to be." He gathered up the files. "Well I have a lot of reading to do." He disappeared with a swirl of wind of leaves.

"I was under the impression he did not know the shun shin," the ANBU said.

"It seems Naruto is full of surprises." Danzo said wearily.

"So he is to be my target?"

"Eventually Sai, but not yet." Danzo replied. "He must live long enough to win the war for us."

In a hidden base a man and a woman in black robes with red clouds waited as a pair of astral projections took form around them.

"I take it there is some news?" A blocky figure asked.

"There better be, yeah." An effeminate man with long blonde hair spoke.

The man in the flesh nodded. He had orange colored hair and many face piercings. "It seems our target has returned home. Sasori, you and Deidara are assigned to capture him."

"And how are we expected to capture him in the middle of Konoha?" Sasori growled. "I am not Itachi; I know nothing of their screens and how to circumvent them. Even as powerful as my partner and I may be we cannot fight an entire village."

"The method and timing of his capture I leave to you," Pein informed him.

"Marvelous," Sasori ground out.

Deidara laughed. "Lighten up master Sasori, yeah. Capturing the nine tail will definitely be a blast."

A Surprise Visitor

He left the Namikaze estates in a good mood. His godfather and that little prick Sasuke were out of the village on a mission. The Hokage had decreed that he would not be allowed to leave the village until he'd achieved the five tail state. So since his regular sensei was gone he'd been assigned someone else to temporarily take over his instruction. The Hokage was eager for him to achieve greater power as quickly possible. This sudden haste amused Naruto greatly. "Maybe they shouldn't have wasted all that time after Iruka left," he muttered to himself.

"Cursed demon!"

Naruto looked up to see an old man glaring at him. He was pleased to see the other people on the street suddenly scattering. It had only been a couple weeks, but the villagers were starting to understand the reality of their situation. Namely that they were all sheep and he was a rabid wolf.

"You seem to be angry with me for some reason," Naruto teased. Sometimes he would just kill them without a word, today he felt like playing a little bit. "Have we ever met?"

That seemed to make the old man even angrier. "Of course not you damn demon!"

"Well if we've never met then what reason would you have to be angry with me?"

"You murdered my son!"

"Really? Well I've killed so many people, especially lately. When did I kill him exactly?"

"You killed him the night the Kyuubi attacked this village!"

"I'm sorry, you must be mistaken, you see I was just a newborn baby that night. How could I have killed your son?"

Naruto thought it kind of funny to see the old man turn completely red and begin to shake. "He was a brave ninja defending this village and the Kyuubi burned him alive!"

"Then I still don't see why you want to argue with me, I'm not the Kyuubi."

"He is inside of you!"

Naruto nodded. "He sure is, the way a prisoner is inside a jail. But you can't talk to him so I guess his jailer will have to do huh? You know I could explain to you the fact that I had no choice in what was done to me or try and make you understand that it makes no sense to try and punish me for crimes my resident committed. But to be honest I don't have the time and I'm sure you wouldn't listen anyway." In his right hand a mass of fire came to life. "So why don't you just die instead?"

The old man did not suddenly beg or runaway like others had. He instead spat in his direction and stood his ground. Naruto admired that. As a sign of his respect he made his fire much hotter changing it from regular orange flames to bright red and then to white. He sent the fire at the old man, the white flames consumed him almost instantly. In just a matter of seconds the man was reduced to nothing but ash and a few pieces of bone. It was a swift and near painless death, much kinder than the normal burning he usually handed out.

He continued down the street past the scorch marks. Still in a good mood.

He arrived at the meeting spot, a small red bridge near the middle of the village. Checking his watch he saw he was five minutes early. As he stood on the bridge he noted that people on both sides made

sudden detours rather than try and cross it. Naruto nodded to himself, this was progress.

The past two weeks had been a bit of a blur, a lot had happened. A couple days after he'd first killed villagers there had been an actual protest. An angry crowd had gathered in front of the gates to his estate screaming for him to get out of the village. Seeing them had reminded him of a lot of angry crowds from his youth. He hadn't felt like talking that time. So he had surrounded all of them with clones.

Then he'd lit them up.

He had deliberately used his weakest flames. He'd wanted them to suffer. He'd simply stood there and listened to their screams and their pleas for mercy. Hearing the villagers ask him for mercy only made him angry. If they had ever shown *him* any mercy things might have been different.

"Why do you have to be so cruel Naruto-kun?" Hinata had asked him.

"Because those people were just as cruel to me," he'd answered. "Why should I show them mercy when they never showed any to me?"

"Naruto-kun," she'd said solemnly. "What you're doing isn't justice. It's just revenge."

"I know."

She had looked terribly disappointed at his answer, for some reason that had made him feel just a little bit sad. For a time he'd wondered if she would call off the wedding. If she had wanted to he'd have let her go with no hard feelings. But despite her misgivings they'd still married as planned. Her father had performed the ceremony with her entire clan in attendance. But beside the Hyuuga only the Inuzuka clan had chosen to attend.

Hinata had moved into the mansion and been given a large bedroom far from the one Naruto and Moka shared. Naruto made sure she was never alone, except at night. He made a clone who was always at her side to keep her company when she was not training or on a mission. They didn't consummate their marriage but in person and through his clone he spent a lot of time with Hinata. He talked to her, listened to her, kissed her, and always made her feel welcomed in her new home. Even if she did have to sleep alone. The more time he spent with her the more he grew to like her, especially since she took it upon herself to do most of the cooking.

"I know ramen is your favorite," Hinata said. "I hope you like mine."

He took a mouthful of her savory noodles and was surprised at the delicious flavor. "Mmmmm! That is really good Hinata-chan!"

Hinata blushed and had a pleased smile. "Re... really?"

"Yeah! It's really great!" He attacked the bowl in front of him and had quickly devoured it. As he was taking seconds he noticed Moka frowning at him.

"Do you prefer her ramen to mine?" Moka asked coolly.

"Uh, no of course not, yours is the best Moka-chan." He smiled weakly. It was a blatant lie, but he valued his continued health and well being too much to be truthful.

Moka nodded slightly. "Hinata, you can continue to cook the meals if you like, but I'll be the one who makes ramen for Naruto."

Naruto sighed; well there was still always Ichiraku's. He dug into his second bowl of Hinata's ramen, determined to enjoy what he could.

He glanced at his watch. His new sensei was fifteen minutes late. That was long enough. He began walking back towards home. Being late for a meeting was considered very rude, and he was not about

to wait any longer. As before when he walked people cleared out of his path and gave him a wide berth. Even the handful of ninja he passed made it a point to avoid him. Seeing the fear he inspired only made him feel good.

High above the village of Konoha a clay bird soared through the air. It took less than one minute for a bolt of lightning to strike it and completely destroy it with a small explosion.

On a hillside a few miles away a pair of carefully concealed ninja watched the end result of their experiment.

"That's ten out of ten, yeah." Deidara said.

"It seems their security is very tight." Sasori grumbled. "Only to be expected of a ninja village, particularly one at war. It seems they have a method of detecting any chakra entering their territory."

Deidara laughed. "I say we just send in a whole flock of my little toys and rain down destruction on them while we sneak in, yeah!" He sounded excited. "It will be an artistic masterpiece of random destruction, yeah!"

Sasori shook his head. "You call that art? Your silly explosions are not art! Art is eternal inspiration for the human soul. In any case we will **not** assault the village. He is the last, and we are under no time constraints. We will take him when he leaves the village."

Deidara frowned, clearly disappointed. "I want to do it now! Yeah!"

"This is not one of your ridiculous bombings," Sasori sounded annoyed. "This is a vital mission, and our opponent was strong enough to defeat Itachi. We cannot waste our efforts fighting off the village ninjas as well as trying to capture him."

Deidara grumbled a bit, but grudgingly agreed to follow Sasori's wishes. "How long do you think it will take for him to come out, yeah?"

"It takes as long as it takes."

"Sounds boring, yeah."

"That is unimportant, so long as we succeed in capturing him."

About two hours after returning to his mansion a clone came to inform him that there was a ninja at the gate wanting to speak to him. In order to avoid confusion all the kage bushins who acted as guards covered their faces and hair with black masks. That way when the original showed up it was obvious.

When a Naruto arrived at the gate he saw a ninja with wild silver hair, a green vest, a mask, and his hitai-ite slung over his left eye. Naruto frowned at the man. "I'm guessing you're Kakashi."

Grinning beneath his mask Kakashi nodded. "Yeah, that's me, sorry about being so late."

Naruto looked at his watch pointedly. "Is there a reason you were two hours late?"

"Heh, well I sort of got lost on the road of life."

"I see." Naruto turned around and began walking back towards the mansion.

"Where are you going?" A surprised Kakashi called.

"I was studying some jutsu scrolls, I think I'll get back to them now."

"Ah, but I'm supposed to give you some training."

Naruto halted and looked aback over his shoulder at the man. "If you actually wanted to train me you would not have been two hours late. If you prefer starting at ten rather than eight that would have been fine. But to be deliberately late to a meeting *you* scheduled is nothing but an insult. And the fact that you can't even bother to come up with a reasonable lie only makes it worse. So I won't be working with you, goodbye Kakashi."

Kakashi stood there dumbfounded as Naruto began to walk away again. He'd actually planned to tell him about his father and at least try to change his behavior towards the villagers. "You know I used to be a student of your father's."

Naruto did not bother to stop or turn around. "That's nice."

Kakashi could only stand there and watch as Naruto disappeared around a bend. This was actually a new experience for him. He'd often have students complain about his tardiness, but this was the first time he'd had one flat out refuse to work with him because of it. "The Hokage is not going to be happy about this."

Naruto only just entered his mansion when he spotted a stranger standing there in the grand hallway. He was quite surprised. Somehow or other she had managed to sneak in past all two hundred of his clones and without him sensing her at all. She looked to be a girl of thirteen or fourteen with long orange hair, green eyes. She had on a white button down shirt, a short red skirt, and knee high white stockings.

As soon as he entered she turned around to glare at him. "Who are you?!" She demanded.

Naruto returned her hostile look. "I'm the owner of the house you just broke into, now why don't you tell me who you are."

The girl had a small brown bat sitting on her shoulder. The bat flew into the air and transformed into a large iron mace which the girl

gripped in both hands. "I'm Shuzen Kokoa and I've come here for Moka."

He felt some alarm as he never took a threat to his wife lightly. "What the hell do you mean you're here for Moka?" He growled at her.

The girl held the mace threateningly and began to approach him. "I mean I am taking her away from this place. Now where is she?"

"You're not taking Moka from me little girl."

"We'll see!" With no further warning she covered the distance between them and swung her mace aiming for his chest. She was caught off guard as she saw him transform. His body seemed to mature, his hair grew and lightened, a pair of fangs extended out of his mouth, the scars on his face vanished, and his eyes turned red. Most impressive of all she saw and felt a demonic aura surround him. It had taken on physical form with what looked like four tails swinging above his head. He caught her attack in a single hand with ease. "You're a vampire!" She cried out in shock.

"For the moment," he agreed. Now that she was right up close he noticed something. She was radiating an aura he was very familiar with. It was similar to the one that always surrounded Moka, just much weaker. "You're a vampire too, if a really weak one."

"Hey!" She let go of the mace and instead tried to punch him. He caught that with his other hand and tossed her weapon aside while holding her fist tight.

"Why don't you have red eyes?" Naruto asked casually, she wasn't wearing a rosary. He'd taken her measure, she was pretty strong compared to a human or regular ninja. But she wasn't in Moka's class or his. "You may as well tell me, you're not going anywhere."

As if to prove his point she tried desperately to pull her hand free but he held her perfectly in place. *Unbelievable! He's stronger than neesan! He's almost as strong as father!* "I don't have red eyes

because I haven't fully matured yet. But I'm still really powerful! Now tell me what you've done with Moka or I'll make you regret it!"

He looked down at her. "In case you haven't noticed it *I'm* not the one who's in trouble right now."

"What is going on out here?" Moka stormed down the staircase.
"Naruto-kun why are you using so much power?"

Seeing Moka the girl twisted about and tried to break loose from Naruto's grip. "Neesan! I've finally found you!"

"Neesan?" Naruto let go of the girl and she immediately raced up the stairs.

"Neesan! I've found you!" She leapt to try and give Moka a hug only to smack her head against Moka's outstretched palm.

"Kokoa," Moka said with a frown. "What are you doing here? And why were you attacking my husband?"

Kokoa suddenly froze and stopped trying to give her elder sister a hug.

"HUSBAND?!" Kokao turned around to stare at the still transformed Naruto.

Naruto grinned up at her with his fanged mouth. "So I guess that would make you my sister in law wouldn't it? Welcome to the family little sister."

Her response was to howl and unleash a wave of killer intent as she raced down the staircase determined to kill him.

Dealing with little sister

"You know Moka-chan, growing up I always wanted to have a brother or sister. Sometimes I would imagine what it would be like." Naruto sent his wife a fanged grin. "I always knew siblings fought but isn't this a little much?" All the furniture in the grand hallway was pretty much destroyed, as was one wall.

Moka sadly shook her head. "I apologize my beloved; Kokoa has always had a one track mind and never known when to stop."

"Mmph! Cmph! Mmmph, rrrmm!"

Ignoring the muffled sounds she continued. "When I decided to leave home and find my mother Kokoa was very upset. Even though she and I are half sisters and our relationship was not exactly loving she saw me as a role model. She would challenge me to an endless series of duels as a way to prove herself."

"Let me guess, she never won did she?"

"Rrrm Imm mmm grrrr!"

"No she never did, but that never stopped her from trying." Moka sighed. "Even after I left she refused to accept the fact I had decided to try and find friendship with someone outside the family. She was also upset at my decision to put on the rosary and seal my powers. She would continually track me down and terrorize me in an effort to get me to give up my search for friendship." Moka shook her head a bit. "In our own way we are close I suppose. Certainly my relationship with her is the strongest I have with any of my family."

Naruto looked at her in surprise. "So the sister who constantly attacked and terrorized you was the one you were closest to?" Moka nodded. "Don't take this the wrong way Moka-chan, but your family sounds kind of dysfunctional."

"Dysfunctional does not even begin to describe my family."

"Rrrff, mmmm gnnng klll oooo."

"I'm sorry, did you say something imouto?" Naruto grinned at her. He was no longer surrounded by his demonic aura but was still in vampiric form. "Did you say something little sister?"

From her spot on the floor where she was currently chained hand and foot and gagged Kokoa glared at him murderously.

Moka crossed her arms over her chest and frowned down at her. "Kokoa, it is one thing for you to attack me, but it is quite another for you to attack my husband."

"Hmmm nnnn yrrrr bnnnn!"

She lifted a single eyebrow. "Do not be ridiculous, of course he is my husband."

"Awww, what's the matter? Do you not like having a niisan?" Naruto grinned at her. By the way she was glaring back at him he thought she would bite him if she could. "Now if you're willing to talk sensibly I'll take your gag off. But if you start screaming or cursing me I swear I'll stick you in a closet for the rest of the day. Now are you going to be civilized?"

Though she still looked furious she gave a single nod. Careful to keep his fingers well away from her mouth he pulled down her gag. As soon as it was off she looked at Moka.

"Neesan, what happened? How did this animal force you to marry him?" Moka's immediate response was to bop her on top of her head. "Ow!"

"You will not speak disrespectfully of my beloved," she told Kokoa sharply. "As to being somehow forced into this marriage do not be ridiculous. I married Naruto out of love and no other reason."

"Him?" She looked at Naruto contemptuously. "No way could such a weakling be worthy of my beautiful and amazing sister."

"Well if I'm a weakling what does that make you?' Naruto asked good naturedly. "I did thrash you pretty easily."

"I could definitely beat you!" Kokoa declared loudly.

"No doubt you will begin challenging *him* to duels." Moka shook her head wearily. "Count yourself very lucky that Naruto does not choose to see you as an enemy even though you attacked him. He has within him the power of a demon lord."

"A demon lord? Him? Don't make me laugh!"

"Heh, I wish the villagers had felt that way."

Ignoring his comment she turned back to her sister. "Neesan, I'm really glad you finally got rid of that stupid rosary and let your strong beautiful self come out again. Let's go home neesan and forget about all this."

Moka stepped up to Naruto's side and put her hand into his. "I **am** home Kokoa. Wherever my beloved is, that is my home."

"But what about your family?" Kokoa demanded.

"What about them?" Moka asked coolly. "There has never been any warmth or real feeling between any of us. If there had perhaps I would not have been so lonely and would not have decided to leave. Naruto is the one who has given me love, not my family. My loyalty is to him, not them."

Kokoa stared at her. "You'd really choose him over your family?"

"Is that not what I just said?"

Kokoa turned her attention to Naruto. "Just how the hell did you manage to convince my beautiful and strong sister to be with you?"

Naruto seemed to think about it for a second. "Well there is this thing I do with my tongue..." Moka immediately slapped him in the back of the head. "Ow!"

"We love each other and have taken away each other's loneliness; it is as simple as that. I love him and I will not leave him for any reason."

"Father will never accept this," Kokoa said darkly. "You know that right?"

Naruto was surprised to see a nervous look cross his wife's face. "Father has nothing to do with this. He agreed to let me go."

Kokoa shook her head. "He agreed to let you be with your mom and then decided to leave you alone when you were playing at being a school girl. But actually getting married? And to a human? Even if he does have a little bit of power in him father will never accept him or this marriage."

"It is not father's decision."

Kokoa laughed nastily. "Oh I want to be there when you tell him that!"

"Moka is my wife," Naruto said in a low and serious tone. "And **no one** is going to take her away from me, and that includes her father."

Kokoa grinned at her sister. "He has no idea does he?"

"Enough," Naruto said sharply. The good humor he'd been in was gone. Anything that threatened to separate him from Moka was enough to sour his mood. "Even though you attacked me I don't have anything against you. It's obvious you care about Moka, in your own weird way, and I've always wanted a little sister so I certainly won't hurt you. But I think you should go."

Kokoa smiled at him. "Well I *could* go, but I think I'd like to stay here for awhile. I've missed my beautiful and strong sister and I'd like to spend some time with her. Otherwise, I'll just have to go home and tell father what's going on."

"I think it would be best to allow her to stay," Moka said quickly. She looked to Naruto and he could see the worry.

"All right," Naruto nodded slowly. "If you want her to stay that's fine. But let's get something straight." He turned to the chained up girl with the orange hair and pigtails. "I don't appreciate being attacked or threatened. Since you are a part of my family now I won't seriously hurt you, but if you attack me again I will lock you in a closet. Are we clear?"

Kokoa laughed. "Fine, *if* you can actually put me in one."

"Kokoa," Moka said firmly. "You will not attack him again. Is that clear?"

"Fine," she muttered. "Now get me out of these damn chains."

Though he still had his doubts Naruto freed her.

Unfortunately almost as soon as she was freed the main door opened. A beautiful girl with dark blue hair and pale lavender eyes entered. She froze, stunned not by the arrival of a guest but by the utter destruction of the once pristine grand hallway. "Naruto-kun! What happened here?"

Kokoa looked at the girl suspiciously and turned to her sister. "Who's that?"

"That is Hinata," Moka answered. "Naruto's second wife."

Kokoa froze for a second, then turned to glare furiously in Naruto's direction. "SECOND WIFE?! You disgusting pig! My beautiful and

amazing sister isn't enough for you?!" With that she immediately charged at him.

"Is this really all right?" Hinata asked nervously.

"It's fine Hinata," Moka reassured her.

"But are you really going to let Naruto leave her chained and locked up in that closet?"

"It's just until tomorrow, oh and don't try to feed her or she may try to escape."

Hinata shook her head and wondered, not for the first time, what her life had turned into.

"So he refused to accept instruction from you?" The Hokage said coolly.

An embarrassed Kakashi tried to laugh but it wouldn't come. "Pretty much."

"You are dismissed."

"Hai Hokage-sama." Kakashi got out as quickly as he could.

The Hokage frowned and looked at the papers on his desk. They were petitions from the villagers and from business groups asking that Naruto be arrested or at the very least expelled from the village. Those did not worry him. Konoha was not a democracy, here political power rested in the hands of the ninja, and especially with the clans. It was the mounting opposition among the clans that was beginning to worry him. As Hokage he held, theoretically, total power. The Council was there to advise him but he was not required to accept their advice. They could not pass laws over his veto. They could not

prevent his laws from going into effect. In theory the Council held no actual power.

The reality was very different, as Sarutobi had once discovered. If the clans were against him they could easily circumvent his orders. To really rule he had to have the support, or at least the tolerance, of the Council members. Naruto's actions were making that more and more difficult for him to hold on to. The problem was he had to be very careful how he dealt with Naruto. Jiraiya's seal gave him control over him, but nothing like total control. If he tried to hold the leash too tight Naruto might disappear or turn on him, even at the risk of immediate death. He had hoped that Kakashi, as the Yondaime's only remaining student, might have struck a cord with Naruto and calmed him a bit. Instead Naruto had been insulted by the copy nin's perpetual tardiness. It was not a surprise as Naruto did not seem to be responding to the Yondaime's sensei either. He needed a way to calm the situation a bit, and perhaps demonstrate Naruto's value to the village.

An hour later in the office of the Hokage Naruto was grinning.

"So I'm finally getting a mission."

The Hokage nodded. "I feel it is time that the village finally get some benefit from your abilities. You are not yet strong enough to lead the assault on Suna, but from what Jiraiya tells me you have acquired several jutsus and are more powerful than any single ninja in this village. You should be more than capable of completing this mission."

"You're actually letting me go alone?" His grin turned into a smile.
"You actually showing a little trust in me?"

"I trust you to obey my orders, should you fail to the hunter nins will be sent after you. And they will each know the necessary hand sign to end your life."

"Hokage-sama, your doubt wounds me. Of *course* I will be more than happy to carry out your orders. I'm just surprised that you're letting me do this alone."

"The only one I would trust to accompany you would be Jiraiya, and he will not be back for a week or so. If you would prefer to wait..."

"No thanks," Naruto quickly folded up the mission order and stuffed it in a pocket. "I'd rather work alone."

"Very well then, you are to depart tomorrow morning. I expect this mission to be a ringing success, show me and the village what an asset you are to us."

"Oh don't worry, I'll show you all something." He chuckled to himself. "I'll be your killer." He laughed. *And I do mean that literally.*

No fun at all

So, this is what war looks like. There was an abandoned and burned out village. Scattered along its empty street were skulls and other bones. (Since attending Youkai Academy he had come to take the sight for granted.) The rice patties that surrounded the village were becoming choked with mud and weeds. This was Rice country. Once it had been a peaceful little backwater where they grew rice and made sake. Then one day Orochimaru had come before the Rice Daimyo and promised to make his nation a famous and respected power. The Daimyo had been flattered to receive the attention of one of the Sannin, and been seduced by the idea of becoming Daimyo of a powerful nation. He'd agreed to give Orochimaru his full support. Though Orochimaru had a well earned reputation as a liar and a deceiver he actually kept his bargain. He'd created the Sound village out of nothing and through his sheer will and genius did indeed turn Rice country into a powerful nation, one that could even start and fight a war against the might of Konoha and Fire country. Though the price had turned out to be higher than expected.

Naruto took a leisurely drink of water as he looked around the charred landscape. He'd seen a whole lot of empty villages since crossing into Rice country. He wondered if the Daimyo would have still thought his bargain a good one. Since he and his entire family had been long since murdered he doubted it. Despite the gloomy scenery Naruto was actually enjoying himself. He was glad to be out of the village. Except for Moka there was nothing he missed about it. (Well, maybe he missed Ichiraku's and Hinata a little too.) The mission itself seemed like an interesting challenge.

At the moment he was in his vampiric form and *without* his demonic aura. Using it was like lighting a signal fire for every ninja for miles around. He needed to be unseen until he'd found the target. He put away his canteen and opened a small pouch on his belt. He pulled out four separate plastic bags, each with a scrap of fabric inside. He

opened each one at a time and took a whiff. Then after putting them away again he tasted the breeze.

After a few minutes he picked up the scents, they were only the barest trace, days old. But so long as it didn't rain...

He looked to the northwest and smiled. Before leaping away though he sent a quick a glance behind him towards the south. *It's time to hunt!* With a laugh he leapt away towards the northwest.

"This fucking sucks! Why do we have to do such shitty work?" Tayuya demanded.

"It is what Lord Orochimaru commands us to do." Jirobo answered wearily. Her constant complaints were tiring.

She chose to ignore him as she usually did. "We're some of Orochimaru's toughest ninja; we're being wasted on these stupid patrols! We ambush a few ninja burn a few villages, what's the point?"

"Maybe you should tell Orochimaru-sama you'd like a new assignment?" Sakon teased. "I hear he's always looking for volunteers for 'special service.'"

Tayuya shuddered. "No thanks," she was brave enough to face almost anything, but not their master.

Since the failed attack on Konoha their master had grown increasingly isolated and vindictive. Some whispered he was growing increasingly mad as well. 'Special service,' was a code phrase for the bizarre medical experiments he continued to conduct. Even facing the constant threat of the leaf nins Orochimaru still insisted on spending most of his time in his lab experimenting on ninja. He used enemy prisoners when available, his own men when not. Orochimaru claimed he was creating a new, 'super weapon' that would allow him to destroy the leaf nins once and for all. The rumors

said it was supposed to be a new curse seal, a much more powerful one that didn't kill ninety percent of those subjected to it. If true such a seal would be great. But...

"What the hell are we still fighting for?!" Tayuya burst out, her fear and her exhaustion getting the better of her. "We've already lost this stupid war!"

"Careful what you say Tayuya! That is rank treasons." Somehow through everything Jirobo had managed to keep his faith in Orochimaru. He and that idiot Kabuto were about the only ones. The rest still served him only out of fear.

"You think so you fat pile of shit?" She snapped at him. "The leaf nins have overrun the whole fucking country! We have to hide in caves and underground and sneak around picking off a few stragglers when we can."

"We're conducting a guerilla campaign," Jirobo tried to sound like an expert. "We're exhausting the enemy through attrition until he loses the will to fight and abandons the field."

"Oh yeah, the leaf nins are going to just give up trying to kill Orochimaru and go fucking home! Wake up you stupid fuck! They'll never stop, they'll never quit, not until they kill Orochimaru. We need to run away while we still can!" Tayuya was starting to sound hysterical.

"You run you die," Sakon said. "You know that if you run either Orochimaru or his pet Kabuto will come after you. Face it, there's nowhere to run."

She looked at him miserably. She knew how true that was. Many sound ninja had tried to escape this pointless war. Within 48 hours their heads would always end up on display for all to see. For the dwindling forces of Sound there seemed to be no escape save through death.

Kidomaru leapt down among them, he'd been off scouting while they rested. He had a satisfied grin on his face. "Found one."

The four of them were staring at their target. He was just sitting there leaning against a tree asleep, without a care in the world. They could all sense that he had a good bit of chakra capacity, a lot more than normal. But a single ninja had no hope at all against the Sound Four.

"This is too damn easy," Tayuya muttered suspiciously. "Are you **sure** it's not a trap?"

Kidomaru shook his head. "There's no one else for miles around."

"He's not wearing a leaf hitai-ite," Jirobo noted. "Maybe he's from another country, maybe he's even a missing nin."

"So what if he is?" Sakon answered indifferently. "Orochimaru-sama won't care where he's from, he'll just be happy to have a new guinea pig." He looked at the others. "We take him alive; it's always safer when Orochimaru-sama has prisoners to work on."

Tayuya looked back out to where the sleepy ninja remained oblivious to what was coming. There was something about the situation that was making her nervous. "I have a bad feeling about this."

"Don't be stupid," Sakon mocked her. "Occasionally even we have to catch a break. He's probably brand new and hasn't been told that there are nasty things out in these woods. Now let's go." The other three leapt away. Though Tayuya hesitated for just a heartbeat she leapt as well.

"Wakey, wakey." Naruto opened his eyes and stopped pretending to be asleep. A young man was standing in front of him. He was smiling with green lips. "I hope I didn't disturb your sleep."

Naruto casually looked about to see the other members were surrounding him. At the moment he was just human. They were as well; none of them had activated their curse seals yet. Yawning he got up to his feet. "Not at all, I've been waiting for you."

With those words the smile slipped and the others suddenly stiffened a bit. "What do you mean you've been waiting for us?" Sakon asked suspiciously.

He released his power and took on his vampire form. The red chakra flowed over him and four tails took shape. "What do I mean?" Naruto said pleasantly. "Just that my mission was to kill the four of you. Now activate your curse seals, or this will be no fun at all."

What Moka couldn't give him

Sensing his immense power they all jumped back as they activated their curse seals. They all took them to the second level, it was dangerous and used up their bodies but given what they were facing it was definitely warranted. For his part Naruto took no immediate action. Instead he just stood there and allowed them to activate their powers. The truth was he was eager for a real test of what he could do. Slaughtering villagers got sort of boring after awhile.

Looking around at each of them he smiled. "I've read your personnel files, very impressive, individually and as a unit you're credited with killing or abducting close to two hundred Leaf ninja. Before we start this mind if I ask you something?"

"What?" Sakon said warily. Despite their own vast powers and ability none of them were eager to begin. Their opponent's power level was frightening and his abilities completely unknown.

"Is it true that the four of you actually once infiltrated Konoha and tried to kidnap Sasuke?"

"Yeah that's true," Sakon admitted. "Not one of our best moments."

"Lord Orochimaru actually sent us to see if he would defect voluntarily first. He thought Sasuke might be willing to in order to gain more power."

"What happened?" Naruto asked curiously.

"The arrogant little prick said no," Tayuya said. "By then he'd been assigned to Jiraiya and was starting to get much stronger. He said he preferred the Sannin and village he already had."

"Only then did we try and capture him by force," Jirobo recalled.

"We would have too except his fucking sensei showed up," Tayuya cursed.

Sakon nodded. "Before we knew it we were fighting Jiraiya, Sasuke, Kakashi, and half the ANBU. We were lucky to get out of Konoha alive, and after that we had Jiraiya trying to chase us down."

"We only escaped thanks to the noble sacrifice of our former leader Kimimaro," Jirobo intoned sadly. "He was sick but still held off Jiraiya long enough to cover our escape."

"Now since we answered your question how about you answer one for us?" Sakon said.

Naruto nodded. "That seems fair, what do you want to know?"

"Just who the hell are you?"

Chuckling he gave Sakon and the others a small bow. "I used to be Uzumaki Naruto, but my last name got temporarily changed to Namikaze. More importantly I'm the container of the nine tailed Demon Lord Kyuubi."

"You possess the Kyuubi?" Sakon said fearfully.

"That's right."

Behind him it was Jirobo who finally moved. Slapping his hands down onto the ground he cast a quick jutsu. The ground around Naruto grew and he was quickly trapped within a dome of earth and stone. "I've got him!" The fat ninja cried proudly. "I'll drain him dry." He could feel his opponent's chakra start to flood into him.

Tayuya didn't look anywhere near so certain. She could still sense his chakra inside the dome; it didn't seem diminished at all. "Are you sure? Can even a fat pig like you eat that much chakra?"

"No one has ever..."

A side of the dome exploded and the four of them had to take cover. Meanwhile Naruto strolled out of the ruined structure. "Awww, and we were having such a nice talk too! Oh well, I guess I should get on with it." He smiled at Sakon. "I'll start with you."

With a speed he couldn't even follow with his eye Naruto raced up to him and slammed a fist coated in red chakra into his chest. He went flying, crashing into and through several trees before finally crashing into the ground. He was given no chance at all to recover as Naruto instantly grabbed him by his tunic and lifted him effortlessly off the ground.

"Not giving up so soon are you?"

In reply a third arm materialized from out of the middle of his chest and tried to punch Naruto in the face. Naruto made no effort to dodge and allowed the harmless hit to bounce off his cloak.

"You seem to have an extra arm. Here, let me fix that for you." Still holding Sakon up with one hand he grabbed the arm with his free one. With one quick yank he tore the arm right off. He left a bloody stump sticking out of Sakon's chest spurting blood.

"Aaaaah!" A second transformed body spilled out of Sakon's. His skin was red and a horn stuck out of his head. With his right arm he was trying to staunch the blood flowing from the stub left below his left shoulder.

"You would be Ukon, right? Here I think this is yours." He tossed him the severed arm.

Ukon was screaming mindlessly. Sakon reached out with both his trying to grab hold of him. There was no penetrating the demonic aura that was draped around him. Naruto glanced at him and grinned.

"Let me guess, you're trying to merge your body with mine, right?" Naruto laughed softly at him. "Sorry, the only one I like merging my

body with is my wife Moka." Contemptuously he threw Sakon on top of his still screaming sibling. "You know I really did think this was going to be a challenge."

In the distance he heard a flute begin to play.

The world around him rippled and became a series of fantastic and weird colors, almost as though he were suddenly within some strange painting. Looking around he smiled. Obviously he was trapped in a genjutsu. After his run in with Itachi one of the first things he had learned was how to deal with them. Iruka had shown him the standard dispelling method long ago. The same method that had proven worthless when trying to defeat Itachi's genjutsu. But there was another way to disrupt a genjutsu.

He slapped both palms together. "**Chakra Pulse.**" He couldn't work jutsus while in his vampiric form, but he could send out a wave of chakra energy. It was not too different from sending out killer intent. His chakra pulse rippled through and the bright colorful world around him dissolved and was gone. There instead was a shaky Sakon trying to get his brother up on his feet.

"Going somewhere?" Naruto asked.

"Hey you!"

Naruto turned to see the transformed and six armed Kidomaru. Opening his mouth he spat out a thick stream of white webbing. The webbing struck his demonic aura and flowed around it, molding itself as it spread. Kidomaru opened his jaw as wide as he could and poured out the webbing. It swiftly covered Naruto up completely, even flowing over and covering his four tails. The webbing poured and poured from his mouth, massing and immobilizing Naruto where he stood. When Kidomaru could spit out no more there was an actual cocoon where Naruto had been standing.

Kidomaru was panting, drained by the need to create so much of the webbing so quickly. "All right, that should hold him long enough for

us to... to..." He paused as he could see and smell smoke coming from the cocoon. Then all at once the cocoon was a mass of flames. Kidomaru stared as his webbing was consumed by the white hot fire. His heart sank; he knew his webbing could be burned, but not this easily. It should have taken hours even with a strong fire jutsu. Instead his work was disappearing in just seconds right before his eyes. *He's completely beyond us, we can't beat him.* But even though he despaired he pulled his bow off his back and began firing arrows.

Naruto watched the arrows strike and bounce off. "You think that's going to kill me?" Each of his hands contained white fire. "A whole fucking village couldn't kill me and you think a few arrows will? Just die." He sent the white fire at Kidomaru in front and Sakon and Ukon behind. Kidomaru made no attempt to escape and got off one more arrow before the flames reached him. Sakon dived to try and protect his brother... not that it made any real difference. The white flames consumed all three of them before they could even cry out in pain.

Tayuya and Jirobo watched their teammates die. They'd been a team for years, fought and survived all sorts of battles and dangerous situations. They were among the most powerful of Lord Orochimaru's soldiers. But in an instant Kidomaru, Sakon, and Ukon were gone.

In sudden panic Tayuya realized that she was probably going to die too. She was a ninja and had known for a long while that this was how it would probably end. Lately she'd been facing the fact that the odds of her living to old age had been getting longer and longer. Nevertheless, she didn't want to die today. She put her flute to her lips and began to play a new tune. She would use her most powerful weapon. There were three large puffs of smoke and three twisted twenty foot tall humanoid creatures appeared. They were her Doki, three low ranking demons she had been able to make a contract with. Playing her flute for all she was worth she sent her three Doki after her enemy.

Naruto grinned.

One of the Doki had its face covered in wrappings. It brought its arms down in an effort to crush him. The massive arms hammered into the ground raising a cloud of dust. Naruto had moved at the last instant and easily avoided the blow. He brought his fist into the creature's chest and sent it reeling back despite its size. A second Doki landed behind him and brought down an iron club where his head should have been, only to have Naruto dance aside and deliver another punch that sent this monster flying as well.

Tayuya controlled their movements with her music and was playing maddeningly fast to try and get them to keep up with their opponent. But no matter what she did or what combination of attacks she ordered up her Doki could not touch him. He in turn could knock them about with ease.

"We're going to die," Jirobo said. He sounded resigned to his fate. Maybe in spite of all his faith in Orochimaru he too had seen death as the only escape.

She'd have screamed at him to shut up but didn't dare take her mouth from her flute for even a second. It was soon clear to her that her opponent was playing with her servants. He was testing himself against them but there was never even a hint of desperation in any of his moves. It was almost like he was using her Doki to spar against. The fight lasted about five minutes before he seemed to grow bored with it. At that point he began ripping off their heads. Each Doki disappeared in a puff of smoke.

That left him standing there looking at her and Jirobo.

"Get out of here Tayuya," Jirobo told her.

"What the hell are you talking about you dumb ass?"

"I'll hold him off as long as I can. I'd like it if at least one of us lived. Try and get away, maybe Orochimaru-sama will think you died."

Without another word he ran towards their enemy.

I'm a fucking coward! She cursed herself again and again as she raced through the trees. She had no idea where she was going or what she would do if she somehow survived. All that was on her mind was getting as far away as fast as she could. That was what she was thinking when she was grabbed in mid air and suddenly slammed into the ground.

"Wakey, wakey." An amused voice teased. "I hope I didn't disturb your sleep."

She opened her eyes to see her blonde enemy smiling at her, his fangs were over his lower lip. His red chakra was gone. He was holding her pinned to a tree with one arm. Seeing his protection not there she'd have grabbed a kunai and stabbed him... except she didn't carry kunai. Her only weapon was her flute. She wondered if she could use it to stab him through his eye.

"Please don't kill me." She hated herself for saying those words and for the tremor in her voice as she said them.

He tilted his head and gave her an amused look. "And why shouldn't I? Can you give me a reason?"

Her face turned a deep red. "I'll... I'll let you have me." She was surprised to see a look of disgust cross his face. She knew she was a bit of a tom boy but was she *that* unattractive?

"No thanks," he told her. "I'm not into taking women by force. Besides, there's only one woman for me." Still holding her against the tree he began to lean in close. She was staring into those red eyes of his; she couldn't seem to make herself look away. "But maybe there is something you can give me, something I've been wanting for awhile now."

"Wh... what?" She was truly scared now. She knew her life was completely in his hands.

He leaned in and put his lips to her ear. "My wife let me try it with her, she warned me I wouldn't like it but she let me try anyway. She was right, it was bitter. A vampire's blood is too bitter to stand."

"Va... vampire?" She was beginning to shake.

She could feel the heat of his breath against her throat. "You smell... delicious."

She cried out as his fangs tore into her neck.

A name

The pain was sharp and sudden. Instinctively she tried to push him away but he didn't seem to even notice. His mouth was latched on and she could feel him sucking out her blood.

"Stop it!" She tried punching, tried kicking, but he wouldn't let her go. She felt her strength begin to fade as his teeth remained latched on. Her arms felt heavy, she let them drop to her sides. She was beginning to feel cold. *This is it.*

Then without warning he released her. He pulled back his mouth and let go of his grip. She dropped wordlessly to the ground. Staring up she could see his face was flushed and he looked like he was in ecstasy.

"Unbelievable," he seemed to mutter to himself. "Even better than Hinata's ramen." She watched as he licked his lips to get the last traces of her blood. For a moment he just stood there seeming to be lost in the afterglow. Then he glanced down and deemed to notice her again. "You have some really good tasting blood."

She felt drained and could barely move. "You, you... drank my blood." She whispered.

"Yeah, and I took a little more than I should have. Sorry about that, but this was my first time." He reached down with one hand and cupped her chin; she was surprised that his touch seemed gentle. "I'll be more careful next time."

"Ne... next time?"

He smiled at her displaying his bloodied fangs and teeth. "Right now Tayuya you have two choices. I was sent here to kill five enemy ninja; Sakon, Ukon, Kidomaru, Jirobo, and you. Now I'm going to kill five before I go home again. I wouldn't want the Hokage to think I'm

lazy or anything. The only question is who'll be the fifth. The easiest thing would be for me to have another drink and finish you off." He tilted his head and stroked her cheek with one finger. "But it would be a real shame for me to never have your blood again. So I'll give you a choice, do you want to be a corpse or a servant?"

He continued to look at her with that bloody smile of his and she realized he was waiting on an answer. "I... I want to fucking live. I'll serve you... Naruto-sama."

He laughed. "Glad to hear it, and you don't need to be so formal, just plain Naruto is fine. And if you don't do anything stupid, like try to betray me, I'll put you on my friends list." He turned away from her and looked south; he seemed to sniff the breeze. "Now I've two candidates to fill your spot. I want you to wait right here for me, please don't try and run away. It'll really annoy me if I have to track you down again. I'll be back soon, this shouldn't take too long."

He leapt away and was gone. She just sat there leaning against a tree. She didn't think she could even stand, let alone try and run. *Not that I would bother*, she thought. *I'm sure he would put my head on a platter too*. She had effectively gone from being Orochimaru's property to being Naruto's. Her one small consolation was that since he seemed to like her blood so much she might actually be safer with him than she ever was with Orochimaru. *Well, at the very fucking least I'll get to live above ground for awhile*.

As he went south he changed his form to that of a half youkai kitsune. He would be 'limited' to only three tails worth of chakra and could not hold the cloak for anywhere near as long. But now he would be able to use jutsus again, he counted that as worth the trade off.

He went a couple of miles and came to a halt. He sniffed the air again and growled. His sense of smell was not quite as good but still good enough. "So are you two finally going to show yourselves or what?" He shouted. For a minute there was no response and he

thought they would remain hidden. But at last two figures came out of the woods. They both had black robes with red clouds. One was short and blocky with a bandanna covering most of his face. The other was tall and lithe with long flowing blonde hair.

"Very good," the blocky one said. "How long have you known?"

"I picked up your scents about an hour after I left the village."

"So why didn't you do anything, yeah?" The effeminate looking one asked.

Naruto shrugged. "So long as you didn't attack me I really didn't see a reason to."

"Very sensible," the short one growled.

"So I am guessing you're Sasori and you're Deidara. Am I right?"

"How could you know who we are?" Sasori demanded. "Our identities are carefully guarded secrets."

I know because Itachi told me all of your secrets. "I guess they weren't carefully guarded enough."

"Just how much do you know about our organization and its members? And is the information yours alone or does Konoha know as well?"

Naruto merely smiled. "Now that would be telling."

Hidden behind the bandanna Sasori's jaw opened and he fired off several projectiles. They landed all around Naruto and exploded on impact, filling the air around him with a foul smelling blue smoke. Naruto gasped and collapsed.

From out of his body Sasori reached out with a large metal tail. He scooped up Naruto's unconscious form and brought him over.

"Yeah, how do you think he knew about us?"

"I have no idea," Sasori admitted. "Before we extract the Kyuubi from him he will be interrogated. I doubt it could have been through Konoha's spy network. I have an agent on their Council and he would have informed me."

Naruto's eyes suddenly popped open and he grinned as his body was surrounded by his demonic aura. "Really? I didn't know that!" He grabbed the metal tail and ripped it apart with ease. "And you wonder how your secrets get out?"

"How?!" Despite the size of his body Sasori dodged away easily. Deidara leapt away in the opposite direction. "My poisons never fail!"

Naruto laughed and began to run through hand signs. "All right, I'll share a secret with you. I'm immune to poisons. **Kamikaze no Jutsu** ." It was the most powerful wind based jutsu in Yukari's book, and he eagerly poured as much of his chakra into it as he could. It was an area attack jutsu and as he watched the hurricane force winds began to slice apart the trees and landscape in front of his eyes.

"Take this, yeah!" A pair of clay birds slammed into Naruto's back and exploded. When the smoke cleared the chakra cloak was still in place and looked unaffected. *Is this some sort of ultimate defense?* Of all the jinchuriki they had dealt with the Kyuubi was easily the one they knew the least about. For most of the time he had either been too young to use his power or hidden away. Since his return they'd received reports, but all they'd really learned was that the Kyuubi liked to play with fire. Deidara shoved his hand into a case filled with clay. The mouth in the hand began to chew the clay.

With the jutsu complete the landscape in front of his eyes was utterly flattened. There was nothing but stumps and debris.

And the bits and pieces of puppets.

Naruto landed in front of a chunk of Sasori's main, 'body.' The head had somehow come through completely intact and looked like a teenage boy with red hair. The neck had a cut about a third of the way through. It still attached to a chest that was mostly gone, along with both arms. In the middle of the chest was a cylinder that had been cut neatly in half. The blood and human tissue it had contained was smeared all over the ground.

"You actually survived being right in front of my jutsu? I'm impressed." Naruto told him.

"No," Sasori spoke calmly with a young man's voice. "You've killed me. The part of my original body that allowed me to use chakra has been destroyed. I can only survive a few minutes without it."

Naruto merely shrugged. "That's what you get for coming after me. If you'd left me alone I'd have never bothered any of you."

"That was never a possibility," Sasori informed him. "We have captured eight of the Bijū and now only you remain. Akatsuki will never rest until they have taken you as well."

"Then I'll kill every last fucking one of them," Naruto said coldly.

"I wonder," Sasori said. "You truly are impressive. To have killed Itachi, Kisame, and myself is no small feat. But you will be no match for our leader."

"I'll deal with Pein too if I need to."

Sasori looked very surprised. "You really do know many of our secrets don't you? How?"

Naruto looked at him. "If I tell you will you tell me who the traitor on the Council is?"

"Very well."

Naruto shrugged again, dead men could tell no secrets. "Itachi betrayed all of you. Before he died he told me everything he knew about Akatsuki including all your identities and abilities."

"I see, I am very disappointed. I thought much more highly of him."

"People have a way of disappointing some times, now will you tell me what I want to know?"

"Yes, his name is..."

Hearing the name Naruto grinned. *Oh! This is too good!* After speaking the name Sasori seemed to wind down and come to a stop.

As Naruto stood there ten clay birds flew into him and exploded. As before when the smoke cleared Naruto was still unaffected. He looked up to see Deidara riding the back of a clay bird about the size of a horse.

"I'll let you run away," Naruto called out to him. "I needed to kill five and now I have. Go back to Akatsuki and tell them to stay away from me. Tell them that if they keep coming after me I'll kill them all."

"Yeah, think I'll let you get away with killing master Sasori?"

"What I think is that there's not a damn thing you and your stupid little figurines can do to me."

"Yeah? We'll see about that." He stuffed a hand into his case again and let it eat all the clay that was left. At last the mouth in his hand spat out a plump looking bird. He tossed it into the air. As it began to plummet it expanded into the size of a house. "This is C-4, my most powerful explosive. It will detonate with enough force to level a village. I'll show you my art! Yeah! I'll show you art is a bang!"

Naruto stood his ground and the massive and homely thing fell to earth. It struck the ground about twenty feet from him and exploded.

Circling above the wind from the explosion buffeted him and he had to adjust to keep from falling. Just the sight of such a magnificent explosion made him laugh and shout with glee. "Yeah! This is art!" He screamed to the heavens. It was only after he had done it that it suddenly occurred to him that the leader would be unhappy if the target was actually dead. He suddenly worried about how angry the leader might be.

But when the smoke cleared away he saw he'd had no reason for concern. Naruto was still standing there surrounded by his three tailed cloak.

"Your art's very pretty, but not really effective." Naruto shouted up. "Now be a good little boy and go deliver that message before I decide to just kill you."

Deidara stared down at him, not believing that his most powerful attack had been useless. For a moment he thought about opening the mouth on his chest and feeding it clay. That really would be his ultimate attack... and his last. In the end he banked around and flew away, he would allow the leader to be the one to avenge master Sasori.

Naruto headed back north to collect his new and tasty servant before beginning the trip back home. He was smiling to himself and already making plans on just how he would use his information.

A punishment to fit the crime

"Here you are sister, enjoy." Moka handed her a plastic bag filled with a dark red liquid.

Kokoa accepted it with an annoyed frown. "Why do I have to drink from a transfusion pack?"

"You were the one who wanted blood." Moka reminded her pointedly. "This is what we drank growing up is it not good enough for you?" She looked at her little sister questioningly. "Have you taken blood from a person yet?"

"No," Kokoa admitted, a little embarrassed.

Moka lifted a single eyebrow. "Then what is the problem? Providing this blood without anyone noticing is no small feat."

"Well, it's just that Hinata smells soooo good and..."

"Absolutely not!" Moka said sharply. "She does not know our true nature. Like everyone else in this village she believes us to be human. We are supposed to have what they call a blood line limit which will excuse a great deal such as our auras and my red eyes. But were we to become known as blood drinkers all sorts of problems would arise."

Kokoa planted her fists on her hips and looked angry. "That's another thing! Why do we have to hide what we really are? We're vampires! We are the elite of all monsters! We should be proud of that fact. Instead we hide it like it's some sort of dirty little secret."

"I feel no shame in what I am," Moka said coolly. "Nevertheless the fact remains that openly proclaiming the fact would cause nothing but trouble."

"I've never had trouble telling people what I am!"

Moka smiled knowingly. "You have yet to fully develop your vampiric abilities or aura. Once you have you may find things more difficult."

"If this place is so bad for vampires than why stay?" Kokoa demanded.

"You already know my reasons for being here."

"For *him*, " the contempt in her voice caused Moka to frown dangerously at her. "If he loves you so much how come he isn't even here?"

"He is on a mission," Moka said calmly. "It is a simple fact that sometimes work causes separation. But when he returns I will welcome him back and I will be happy."

"Couldn't you be happy living with your family again neesan?"

"No," Moka looked sympathetically at her sister but continued. "I never felt even a scrap of love living there. The only person who has ever given me love is Naruto. I will not live apart from him."

"Why? How can he be so important to you? I don't understand!"

"I know," Moka said sadly. "But perhaps one day you'll meet someone truly special and you will."

"Never! I will never ever let some man, especially some human, ever make me weak."

"You think my love makes me weak?" Moka shook her head. "Just the opposite, the love we share is the source of my greatest strength. Just so long as I have him with me I truly believe I can do anything."

Kokoa stared at her beautiful and strong sister unable to comprehend it. Couldn't she see what a weakness it was to let someone else have this kind of control over you? She'd tried to point it out but her neesan remained willfully blind. Well when words fail...

"I want to have a spar!"

Moka sighed; her sister had really not changed at all. "Very well let's go to the dojo.

Twenty Minutes Later

"We are done here," Moka turned around to go.

"Wa... wait I ca... can still fi... fight." A bruised and battered Kokoa struggled to get back to her feet. In her hands she gripped a broadsword that was taller than she was. Despite swaying back and forth she glared at her sister. "I *will* beat you."

Moka sighed, she knew all too well that words would be wasted so she did not try to tell Kokoa to simply yield and spare herself unneeded pain. "I am sure you will sister, but not today." Moving like a blur she smashed her fist into her sister's face holding nothing back. Kokoa went flying on the dojo's far wall. She hit and fell to the floor. This time she did not stir.

Without a word Moka left the dojo.

When Hinata returned home from her rounds at the hospital she found Moka in a normal mood and Kokoa a bit grumpy. When she tried to find out the reason both girls declined to say anything. Kokoa did seem to perk up a bit when she sat down close to her.

"You have a wonderful scent," Kokoa suddenly said to her.

"I do?" Hinata said in surprise. "I have been busy in surgery most of the day, I haven't even showered. I must smell of blood and sweat."

"Exactly," Kokoa smiled revealing her unusual teeth.

"Huh?"

"Please ignore my sister," Moka said while sending Kokoa a warning look.

"Heh, yes, I was just being funny," Kokoa said.

"All right," Hinata didn't understand what was going on but decided to just go ahead. "In any case would the two of you like to go to a little party tonight?"

"A party?" Moka asked curiously. "What sort of party?"

"Well one of my friends is heading back to the front tomorrow. It's sort of a tradition that we girls get together and see her off with a night out at a club."

"Ooh! I've never been out clubbing!" Kokoa said excitedly.

"You are only thirteen, you won't be going." Moka said firmly.

"Actually," Hinata said. "The laws of a ninja village are a bit different from most other places. Here a person is considered an adult once they receive their hitai-ite and become ninja, that usually happens at age twelve."

"I'm sure that if you and I vouch for her no one will question it." Hinata assured.

"Oh come on neesan!" Kokoa implored.

"Hinata," Moka said frowning. "Why are you trying to corrupt my younger sister?"

"I'm not," Hinata said. "I just think that **both** of you could do with a night out. Neither of you ever seem to step outside the mansion. And Moka, I've noticed you've been a little depressed since Naruto left. I thought this would cheer you up. What do you say?"

Kokoa turned to her with huge puppy eyes on the verge of tears. "Pleaaaaaaase?"

Seeing Kokoa like that was far more frightening than her holding a broadsword. "Very well."

They were in a club called the, 'Red Lantern.' There was loud music blaring through overhead speakers and various colored lights were flashing on and off. The club was full and the dance floor was packed. Kokoa was in the middle of the throng dancing about with a savage joy. Despite her obvious youth (or because of it) she had already been approached by several men. She had sent them all away with either a few harsh words or a kick or two. Despite being hit on Kokoa was clearly enjoying herself.

The same could not be said for Moka. She was sitting at a small round table with the four other girls. She sipped her bloody mary and eyed the other girls. There was Hinata of course; she seemed to be very relaxed sitting back sipping on her white wine. There was Tenten; Moka had only met her the one time at Hinata's wedding. She was dating Hinata's cousin and talking mostly with Hinata and grinning at the other two. One of the other girls was the one about to return to the war. She had long pink hair and was pretty drunk by this point, having started drinking the second they arrived. She was in a sorrowful state, but not for the reason one would expect. She had hardly mentioned the fact she was returning to the front in Wind country. Instead all she wanted to talk about was the fact that Sasuke did not want her.

Moka looked at the pink haired girl and shook her head in disgust. Naruto had once told her he would never care for her again. Those words had hurt her like nothing else, but she had refused to give up on him. In her opinion Sakura needed to fight or walk away and begin again. To waste time drinking and feeling sorry for yourself was pointless. That meant the last girl was...

"Come on forehead you have to get over it," Ino said. "Sasuke chose me over you; it's time to move on. You know I hear Rock Lee really likes you."

"That bushy browed freak?" Sakura shuddered. "I don't care if he is a Jonin and one of the top taijutsu specialists. How could I ever love anyone else but Sasuke?"

"Come on, come on forehead, don't be that way." Ino patted her shoulder. "You came in second, that's all there is to it."

"Shut up Ino pig!" Sakura snapped.

"Hey! I'm trying to be nice forehead girl!" Ino shouted right back.

"Ino pig!"

"Forehead girl!"

"Ino pig!"

"Forehead girl!"

"Enough!" An annoyed Moka stood and promptly hit them both on top of their heads.

"Ow!"

"Ow!"

Moka stood glaring down at both girls. "The two of you are behaving like children. If you are adults then behave like it!"

"Who the hell are you to say that?!" Sakura said angrily. "What would you know about having the boy you love reject you?"

"Quite a lot actually," Moka told her coldly. "But unlike you I also had my feelings acknowledged by the one I loved. From what I've heard from your tedious argument Sasuke has never acknowledged your feelings."

"That's not so!" Sakura said furious.

"Really? Then perhaps I have misunderstood. So Sasuke has kissed you? Held your hand? Taken you out on dates?"

"Uhh, not exactly," Sakura admitted. She took another drink and emptied her glass. "But that was only because he had trouble admitting his feelings to me."

"I see, and how long have you pursued him?"

Sakura looked down at her empty glass. "Eight years."

"I see, I had no idea he was so shy."

"Hey you don't understand anything!" Ino said. "Sasuke is special! He's the most amazing man and incredible ninja. He's the last member of his clan and an incredibly deep and thoughtful person."

Yes, he seemed quite thoughtful when he was trying to seduce me.
"And does he treat you with warmth and kindness?"

"What?" Ino stared at her.

"Does he treat you with warmth and kindness?" Moka repeated.
"When you are with him does he treat you like you are his greatest treasure?"

"Well, ah," Ino struggled to explain.

"Normally he would go, 'hn' and try to ignore both of them." Tenten put in with a chuckle.

"Hey! Whose side are you on?" Ino demanded.

"You know it's true," Tenten grinned at her. "Neji used to be like that too until I finally got through to him."

"So he ignores you and treats you coldly?" Moka chuckled. "What a prize he is."

"Shut up!" Ino screeched. "Who the hell are you to talk? Look who you're married to!"

"I am married to a man who loves me, is kind to me, and treasures me." Moka replied.

"He's a monster! He is nothing but a monster!" Ino was furious.

Moka smiled. "Maybe he is, and so what? Monsters can love too."

"I'm sorry about tonight," Hinata said apologetically. "I honestly thought it would be fun." They were back at the mansion having left not long after the argument.

"That is quite all right Hinata," Moka assured her. "Though I doubt I would have agreed in the first place had I known Ino would be there."

Hinata sighed. "Ino is usually not that bad, but, well Sasuke is sort of a special subject."

"Obviously, though I still have no idea why."

"Well, he has always been the tragic figure. And he was always seen as a genius and the best of the best as well. The fact he was so aloof only made him even more desirable to most girls."

"But not you though," Moka said.

Hinata grinned. "No, never me, but then I was always considered a little weird."

"So far as I can tell you were the only sensible one. I imagine that you did seem strange. Sanity would seem strange to the insane."

Hinata laughed a bit and wished Moka a good night. Kokoa had already gone to bed and she had a full shift at the hospital tomorrow.

As had become her habit since Naruto had left Moka decided to stay up and read a bit.

So she was the only one awake when there was knock on the front door.

Before leaving Naruto had put enough chakra into his clones to keep them active for a month. So even though he was away the estates were still fully guarded. So as she opened the door she knew the person had to have been passed through by the guards.

She opened the door and there was the smiling face of her beloved.

"Well hello Moka," Naruto said.

"Naruto-kun!" She gave a shout of pure joy and leapt into his arms. She pressed her face to his neck and took a deep breath.

Naruto felt her suddenly stiffen and pull away. "Something wrong Moka-chan?"

She gave him a look that seemed to be pure evil. "Wrong?" she purred. "What could be wrong my darling?" She suddenly yanked him inside and shut the door. She pushed him roughly against the wall and pressed herself against him. "I've missed you so, and I can't wait a second longer."

"Moka-chan," he leaned forward eager to kiss her only to have her pull back. "What's wrong?"

She wagged a finger in front of him. "Now you bad boy, you know the rules, no kissing. Now take off your clothes."

"Uh, don't you want to go upstairs first?"

Her evil grin widened. "No, we've done it here before." She deftly fell to her knees before him and began to run her finger tips along the

inside of his thighs. "Now take your clothes off and I'll do it the way you like."

With an eager and hungry look on his face he quickly began to strip. "You have no idea how much I want you right now!" He soon stood completely naked before her, his eagerness on display.

Still on her knees she smiled up at him. "Shall I take care of you now?" She teased.

"Yes! Go ahead and do it!"

"As you like... Uchiha Sasuke." She reared back and punched him with all her strength, at his weakest point.

The scream that followed was enough to wake the dead.

In seconds both Hinata and Kokoa were there, along with ten of the clone guards. What they saw was a livid Moka standing over a naked and weeping Sasuke curled up and clutching his damaged body part.

"What happened here?" Hinata asked.

"Hey you bastard!" Kokoa demanded. "Just what the hell were you trying to do?"

"He came here disguised as Naruto," Moka said with a murderous voice. "He wanted to try and seduce me."

Sasuke might have said something in his defense but was too busy weeping.

Moka looked to one of the guards. "Take him to Konoha hospital and as much as you want to don't kill or hurt him."

"Wait!" Hinata called as two guards lifted him roughly. "Aren't you going to let him get dressed first?"

"No!" Moka said angrily. "I told him that if he ever tried anything like this again I would kill him. The only reason I don't is that it would cause problems for Naruto with the village. As it is I'll settle for humiliating him," she smiled wickedly. "And making sure he doesn't breed."

Hinata's mouth dropped open. "You didn't!"

"I certainly did! Given what he was trying to do it seemed a punishment to fit the crime."

Hinata looked horrified but Kokoa laughed like it was the funniest joke ever told.

Welcome home

"Moka-chan?"

Moka looked up from her book. One of the clones / guards was standing there. She was glad that they kept their faces covered. She missed Naruto badly enough as it was. Sometimes she would talk to the clones for a little while and then ask them to dispel so that *her* Naruto would get the memory of the conversation. She never tried to have one of them keep her company, she wanted the original and a bloodless clone would never do.

"Yes?"

The clone sighed in the exact way Naruto would (naturally.) "Ino's at the gate and she screaming that she wants to talk to you."

"Why am I not surprised?" She put the book down and stood up. "I may as well get this over with, send her in."

A couple minutes later the front door opened and in stormed a furious Ino dressed in her usual purple clothing. She wasted absolutely no time in sharing what was on her mind.

"Just what the hell did you do to Sasuke you bitch?!" She came right up to Moka's face and looked ready to bite. "He sent me a message this morning; he's calling off our engagement! What the hell did you do?!"

Moka stood her ground and looked calmly down at the angry kunoichi. "He came to my door disguised as my husband with the intent on taking me to bed. For such an offense I punished him, as was my right."

"Punished him? Punished him how?! The whole village is filled with rumors! They say he was brought to the hospital naked and bleeding last night!"

"He was indeed." Moka replied easily. "After what he tried to do I ordered my guards to deliver him to the hospital just that way. He was so eager to take his clothes off I didn't think he would mind."

Ino screamed and swung her fist in mindless rage. Moka blocked her clumsy punch and delivered a fist right in her belly. Ino gasped in pain and collapsed to the floor.

Moka stood over the hurting girl and frowned down at her. "You know I used to think you ninjas were rather formidable. But given recent experience I am starting to think that Naruto might just be an exception."

Looking up from her spot on the floor Ino still somehow managed to glare even as she clutched her stomach. "Don't you compare me or Sasuke-kun or the other ninjas of this village to that monster."

Moka smirked. "You're right, the rest of you really **don't** compare to him."

Despite the pain Ino got back up to her feet. "You know I think I understand now why he married you. You're as much of a monster in your own way as he is."

"You have no idea."

"How dare you attack Sasuke like that! You..." Ino never saw the slap; she only felt it smack into the side of her face as it knocked her right back down again.

"Does your infatuation really make you so blind?" Moka did not bother to try and hide the contempt in her voice. "Sasuke came here disguised as Naruto to **fuck** me. By all rights I should have killed him for that. Your precious little idol cared so much about you he tried to take advantage of another man's wife. Rather than blame me why don't you blame him? Had he not come here I would never have touched him."

"I don't believe you! Sasuke would never do something like that!"

"Would you believe Hinata?" Moka asked. "She went to the hospital with him last night. She can confirm that he was here naked last night."

"If he was here you must have tricked him! He would never do anything like that!"

"Because he is so in love with you? Is that what you really think?" Moka couldn't but laugh. "Open your eyes you stupid girl, it's obvious he didn't love you. I barely know him and it was obvious even to me. Clearly all he wanted was a brood mare. You should be thanking me for sparing you a lifetime with a man who wants nothing from you but babies."

I need three wives who can give me powerful children. Sasuke had said those exact words to her the night he'd proposed. Ino ground her teeth and pushed the memory away. He did love her! He did! She was sure of it! All he needed was a little more time to finally admit his feelings to her! "Sasuke does love me! It's your fault that he ended our engagement!"

"That's probably true," Moka admitted. "I'm sure as soon as he realized he wouldn't be able to have children ending things with you was the first thing he did."

"Wait a second! What do you mean he won't be able to have children?"

"I thought you knew," Moka proceeded to explain exactly what she had done the previous night. As she did so the blood seemed to drain out of Ino's face.

"You... you insane bitch! Do you **know** what you've done? He was the last of the Uchiha clan! You've doomed his clan to extinction!"

Moka was not sympathetic. "If he was at all typical then I think I have done the world a great service."

Ino leapt to her feet and came straight for her screaming.

Moka waited a second and then delivered a well placed kick to the side of her face. "If you're going to keep attacking me you're just going to keep losing. Know your place." Her kick sent Ino flying into a small table that broke apart on impact.

And I only just finished replacing all the furniture from Kokoa's arrival. Moka saw that her blow had knocked the loud blonde unconscious. Just as well, it's obvious that whatever the facts might be poor little Sasuke-kun can do no wrong.

She had one of the guards return her home while she got back to her book.

The Hokage and his sensei were both in his hospital room. The drugs that helped with the pain also deadened his senses. Even so he was on the verge of losing all self control.

"What the hell do you mean she won't be punished?" Sasuke demanded.

"I am very sorry Sasuke," the Hokage told him. "But the fact remains that she has not committed any crime."

"Not committed a crime? Didn't Hinata tell you what she did to me?"

"She did," Hiashi said unhappily. "She also told me where she found you and in what state of dress. Moka claims you were disguised as Naruto and intended to try and seduce her. Is that true?"

"Even if it is it doesn't excuse what she did to me."

"How could you have been so stupid?" Jiraiya growled.

Sasuke sent him an unbelieving glare. " *You're* saying that? You? You're the biggest pervert and hound this village has ever seen! How many girls have you slept with?"

Jiraiya grinned slightly. "More than I can count, but **none** of them were ever married." He paused. "At least not that I knew. There's no surer way to make a man an enemy. What the hell were you thinking? With all the women in this village who throw their panties at you, you went after Naruto's wife!"

"I thought she was beautiful and strong," he shrugged his shoulder wearily. "I wanted her."

"That is a poor excuse for trying to take advantage of a clan head's wife." Hiashi said pointedly.

Sasuke frowned at him; he was not used to the Hokage not supporting him. "Maybe so, but she has still killed the Uchiha clan. She has to be punished for it."

"And will you be the one to explain to Naruto exactly why his wife is being punished for defending herself?" Hiashi asked sardonically.

"Are you scared of him?" Sasuke said condescendingly.

"Only a fool would not at least be wary of him," Hiashi said. "He must be handled with great care."

"So you're going to just let this go unpunished?"

Jiraiya snorted. "You're not the wronged party here Sasuke, even if you did get the worst of it. Whether you want to see it or not the only one who committed a crime was you. Moka was well within her rights to defend herself with whatever force she deemed necessary."

"Fortunately she has declined to press any charges against you. She is ready to let the matter drop. Let us hope Naruto is as reasonable."

Passing by Hinata's room she heard giggling.

"Stooooop," Hinata's voice was on the verge of laughter.

"Awwwww, does my little Hinata-chan not like being tickled?" Naruto's voice came through clear as day.

In the next instant Hinata's laughter could be heard loud and clear.

Moka quickly continued down the hall so she would not have to listen to any more. *I am not jealous. I said it was all right and I am glad that Hinata is happy.* The fact that Naruto always assigned a clone to keep Hinata company meant that whether the real Naruto was home or not had no real effect on her. Oh she worried about him, and hoped he would be safe but otherwise everything remained exactly the same. Moka had never imagined there might be an advantage to being with a clone rather than the original.

For Moka the clones were only a reminder of what she did not have. If Hinata looked at them with her byakugan she saw a human with an active chakra system. She could not tell the clones from the real thing. But Moka could. It was the fact there was no real blood coursing through them. For Moka the clones smelled almost exactly like Naruto, almost. But that tiny difference was enough to ruin the illusion for her. So while Hinata could be with a clone and forget that he was not the, 'real' Naruto Moka never could.

Sighing she headed to the study to read. With Naruto away she seemed to be spending a lot of time reading. She didn't care much for going out if she didn't have him beside her.

"Moka-chan!"

She saw one of the guards running up to her. "What is it?"

Rather than answer he grabbed a hold of her and gave her an eager kiss. She was surprised, but not angry; usually the guards have

never done this before. Still he felt and tasted exactly like the original. She enjoyed the kiss but did not respond to it.

When the kiss ended the guard looked at her with obvious disappointment. "What's wrong Moka-chan? I thought you'd be a little happier to see me. Don't tell me it's because of what that teme Sasuke did."

She was about to answer when she noticed his scent. Her face split with a happy smile. "Naruto-kun! It's the real you!"

He laughed and rubbed the back of his head. "Yeah, I just got back and I didn't want to waste time before seeing you. I need to go report..."

He was cut off as she grabbed a hold of him and shoved him roughly against the wall. This time she was kissing him and she forced her tongue into his mouth. He responded and they eagerly searched each other's mouths as their hands searched each other's bodies. When she was finally forced to come up for air Naruto was looking beyond pleased. "So I guess you missed me after all."

"I have missed you every day, every hour, every minute." She pressed her face to his neck and her tongue his skin, she could taste the salt from his sweat. "I want your blood," she cried hungrily. She had denied herself waiting for his return.

She felt his hand press the back of her head. "Then take my blood." He told her.

That was all she needed to hear. She eagerly bit down and her mouth filled with that familiar and longed for taste. It was sweeter than any candy could hope to be, it was fire and energy and life and best of all it was *him*. She shut her eyes and focused all her senses on his scent and taste. *Oh how I've missed this! Naruto-kun my love how I've missed you!*

When she let go she stepped back to just look at him. Her face was flushed and she was still in that momentary afterglow she always felt after drinking his blood. She reached out and began tugging at his clothes. "Take me," she commanded. "Take me right here and now, I don't want to wait."

With that his hands began to pull off her dress. She knew just how much he enjoyed taking her clothes off but was grateful that he seemed to be as impatient as she was. In very short order their clothes were off and she was lying on the carpet with Naruto on top of her.

"Hey what is..." Kokoa rounded the corner of the hall way. She froze in horror at the most terrible sight she had ever seen or imagined. "Hey! What the hell are you doing? Stop that! What are you... don't do that! Get off her don't.... neesan what are you doing?!"

"Ooooooh," Moka let out a moan.

"Aaaaaaaah!!" Kokoa turned around and fled.

Naruto lifted his head from between her thighs. "I think we've scarred her for life."

"She'll understand when she's older." She pushed his face back down.

It was a very good welcome home.

A few magic words

Lying on the carpet next to her Naruto smiled. "Wow Moka-chan, you really know how to make a guy feel welcomed."

She chuckled. They were coated in sweat and naked in the middle of the hallway. "Well, I am very glad you appreciate it. Since you are the only one who will ever get that sort of welcome from me."

"You know I was only gone a week. What would you do if I were gone six months?"

"Give you a welcome that would probably kill you, so you had better never be away from me for that long."

He laughed. "Yeah, but what a great way to go!" He gave her a quick kiss before standing.

"What are you doing? I *know* you have plenty of energy left."

He began putting his clothes back on. "I was supposed to report to the Tower as soon as I got back. I'm sure the Hokage will be upset that I've kept him waiting, if I keep him waiting much longer he'll probably send godfather to come look for me."

She sighed and stood up herself. "I suppose it can't be helped." She gave him a wicked grin. "We'll just have to continue this tonight."

"Definitely!"

"And I'll go ahead and make you my special ramen to celebrate your return!"

"Ah, heh, great," despite his best efforts he failed to sound very enthusiastic. "Oh that reminds me, I've hired a servant. I hope you don't mind, I kind of had to make a snap decision."

As she pulled her dress back on she gave him a surprised look. "I have no objection, but I thought you were the one worried about spies living with us."

"Oh it's o.k.; I've already explained what I'll do to her if she tells anyone any of our secrets."

"Why did you suddenly decide to hire a servant? Does she have some special skill?"

"You might say that," he laughed a bit. "What she has is sweet tasting blood. You're welcome to see for yourself if you like."

Moka smiled. "I'm glad you've finally gotten to enjoy the taste of blood, now you understand how much pleasure I always took from it."

"So you're really o.k. with me bringing her here?"

"Of course," Moka replied. "Just so long as the only thing you use her for is her blood."

"Well I thought she might do a little cleaning too." He finished adjusting his clothes. "You know when one of my clones dispelled to give me the memory of bringing Sasuke to the hospital I also got the memory of you saying something about warning him not to do anything like that again."

She nodded. "He came once with flowers and tried to kiss me. I sent him away with his flowers and a warning."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I did not want you to attack or perhaps even kill him. Sasuke seems to be beloved here and I did not want his actions to cause you trouble."

"You should have told me Moka-chan," he said seriously. "I don't want there to be any secrets between us."

She smiled. "I see, in that case why have you never said anything about hating my ramen?"

"Ah, you know huh?" He rubbed the back of his head.

"When I was split into two personalities my gentle side was oblivious, but I have known since I destroyed the rosary."

"Then why have you kept making it for me?"

"Why have you kept eating it?"

The two of them shared an embarrassed grin.

"I won't make it for you anymore," Moka promised.

"No! Please make it for me Moka-chan! I want to have it for dinner tonight."

"Why?"

He leaned over and gave her a gentle kiss. "Because it's one of the ways you show me your love."

Tayuya sat nervously in the grand hallway. Naruto had told her to wait while he tracked down his first wife. That had been awhile ago and the longer she sat there the more nervous she got. She kept looking at the door and half expecting a squad of ANBU to come bursting in. When they had arrived the Chunin guarding the village had recognized her and wanted to arrest her.

Naruto had looked at them, just looked. The Chunin had snapped shut their mouths and frozen in place. He had then brought her here. Before their arrival he had explained what would happen if she betrayed him or told anyone his secrets.

"I'll cook you," he'd said with an easy smile. "I'll use my weakest flame so it'll take a good long while. Betray me and I promise you'll

burn."

She had no doubts at all that he would do exactly as he said.

"Hey Tayuya," a cheerful voice called.

She jumped to her feet. There was Naruto and a gorgeous woman with silver hair and red eyes. She knew that this would be his first wife... who also drank blood.

"Moka this is Tayuya, Tayuya this is Moka, she'll show you a room." With the hasty introductions complete he headed for the door. "Well I have to meet with the Hokage I'll see you both later." And with that he was gone.

Tayuya was left alone facing the strange woman who was looking her over.

"You are a servant," the silver haired woman suddenly said. "Know your place and serve well and I promise you will be well treated."

"Thanks," Tayuya answered carefully. She'd decided to put away her normal attitude at least until she understood her circumstances.

Moka lifted a single eyebrow. "You will refer to me as Moka-san."

"Yes Moka-san."

The other woman leaned in much too close and there was a slight smile on her lips. "Naruto was right," she said. "You do smell delicious."

Tayuya tried not to panic. *Fuck, how the hell did I become a juice box with two straws in me?*

Hiashi was usually not one to display his emotions, but it was pretty damn obvious he was not happy.

"Where have you been?" The Hokage demanded. "I know you arrived in the village over an hour ago."

"I went by my home to see my wife."

"Which wife?" Hiashi asked dryly.

"Moka," Naruto answered.

Hiashi frowned but was not surprised by the answer. "And was meeting with your first wife more important than meeting with your Hokage?"

Naruto grinned. "I don't know about more important, it was definitely more pleasant."

Hiashi made a hand sign. " **Pain.**"

Naruto was caught completely by surprise as he felt a slight twinge on his chest. He quickly grabbed the spot above his heart and cried out as he pretended to collapse. He hoped his play acting had been convincing.

Apparently it had. Hiashi leaned back and spoke. "You forget yourself Naruto. You are indeed a very special case and many exceptions have been made for you. However you are still a ninja and I expect obedience from you."

Naruto took a moment to, 'recover' and then stood back up again. "I was an hour late. From what I hear Kakashi is always at least two hours late to everything. Do you punish him too?"

"You are not Kakashi," the Hokage reminded him coldly. "Kakashi does not burn people alive in the streets. Nor is he known to deliberately disobey orders."

"And what orders did I disobey Hokage-sama?"

"Your mission was to kill all the members of the Sound Four. Yet I have a report that not only did you bring one of their members into this village but you refused to allow her to be arrested."

"You sent me to destroy the Sound Four and I did. The other members are all dead and Tayuya is no longer a threat. In addition I also killed a member of Akatsuki."

"You were attacked by Akatsuki?"

"I was, I killed one who was called Sasori and was a puppet master. I drove off another one named Deidara who used explosive clay."

Hiashi considered that. "I have never heard of this Sasori, but Deidara was a terrorist from Iwa. If you were able to defeat another attempt from Akatsuki that is impressive. I look forward to reading your report. That does not however explain why you have spared Tayuya. She is a well known and dangerous enemy, hand her over to the ANBU."

"No," Naruto said softly. "She belongs to me now."

"Do you require another lesson?" Hiashi asked.

"Do you require a pile of ANBU corpses?"

The two men stared each other down.

"You are coming very close to the edge Naruto," Hiashi said slowly. "Why do you wish to protect Tayuya?"

"What can I say? I like her body." *Or at least her blood.* He doubted Moka or Hinata would like that, but it was the most believable excuse he could think of.

Hiashi wrinkled his nose in distaste. "You are disgusting."

"Really? Am I more or less disgusting than someone who tries to sleep with another man's wife?"

"That too was quite repulsive," Hiashi admitted. "Sasuke was certainly in the wrong and has been made to suffer for his actions. Your wife considers the matter to be closed. I hope that you will as well, but I should warn you that you may not seek revenge against Sasuke. The prohibition against harming ninja of this village still holds. Anything you do to Sasuke will be done to you."

Naruto smiled. "Does that mean if I give him a kiss on the lips I can expect one from you?"

Hiashi stared at him.

"There's no need to worry, I'm satisfied that poor dear Sasuke has suffered enough. If Moka is content then I am too. I won't do him any harm."

Hiashi eyed him carefully. He hadn't expected such a tame submission in this matter. "I am most pleased to hear that. Then if you agree I shall consider this matter closed." Naruto nodded his agreement. "As for Tayuya..."

"She is mine now," Naruto said cheerfully. "I'll kill anyone who tries to take her from me."

Hiashi frowned. "If your two wives are not enough for you there are other... sources for what you seek. I dare say Jiraiya could give you ample assistance in the matter. There is no need for you to keep a dangerous enemy kunoichi for the purpose."

"How about we just say that I'm a man of strange tastes? You want to keep me happy and she is one of the things that will keep me happy. She was supposed to die so it's not like you had any plans for her. Why not just give her to me?"

"I cannot, 'give' her to you. There are no slaves here in Konoha."

"Really?" Naruto grinned. "I wonder what the cadet branch members of your own clan would say about that." The way the Hokage's hand

suddenly twitched told him he'd scored a hit. "Anyway, she'll be a servant working for me of her own free will."

"She is no maid servant; she is a deadly enemy kunoichi. She cannot be allowed free access to simply cause harm or leave to return to her master."

"I'll guarantee her good behavior. If she causes trouble or tries to escape I'll kill her myself."

Hiashi did not like it. He suspected there was more going on than a simple desire to satisfy his lust. From what he'd learned Naruto had never shown an interest in any woman other than his first wife. *What are you playing at? There is more here than meets the eye.* "I could grant her a parole and place her in your care. However were anything to happen I would hold you responsible."

"She'll be a model citizen... just like me."

"I find that less than reassuring, but it will do for now."

In the short time she had known him Moka had done any number of difficult or painful tasks for Naruto's sake. If it would help him she was ready to make any sacrifice. Whether it be a sacrifice of blood, time, pain, or the most terrible sacrifice of all... her pride. And so she took a deep breath and did what she knew she had to.

"Hinata?"

"Yes?"

"Will you teach me how to make your ramen?"

The next morning Sasuke was surprised by a visitor holding a little box wrapped with a red bow.

"So how are you feeling Sasuke?" Naruto asked in a deceptively pleasant voice.

Sasuke looked at him glumly from his hospital bed. He was nowhere near fully recovered. If it came to a fight he doubted he'd have any chance to even escape. "You hear to kill me?" Sasuke sounded bored.

"If I wanted to kill you would I bring you a gift?" Naruto tossed him the box.

Sasuke caught it out of the air. It was a small box that fit in the palm of his hand. He looked at Naruto. "When I open it will it explode or just spray poison?"

"Neither," Naruto assured. "Come on Sasuke, we both know that if I wanted you dead you'd already be smoking by now. Open it, I guarantee it's something you can use."

"Hn," though suspicious he wasn't about to show Naruto he was afraid of anything. Pulling loose the bow he carefully opened the box. Inside were a pair of shiny brass balls, each the size of a golf ball. Seeing what the gift was Sasuke immediately threw the whole thing in the waste basket. "You think you're being funny?" He asked angrily.

"Yeah actually, when I told the girls this morning what I was going to get you Moka, Kokoa, and Tayuya couldn't stop laughing." Hinata hadn't approved though.

Sasuke didn't know or care who Tayuya was. (The only Tayuya he'd ever heard of was an enemy ninja.) "So instead of attacking me you think you're going to just mock me? Do you think I'm that weak? I am going to make you and Moka pay for this."

"No you won't," Naruto said calmly. "You're not going to do a damn thing."

"That a threat?" Sasuke said contemptuously.

Naruto shook his head and approached the side of Sasuke's bed. "Threats are for enemies, and you and I are going to become best friends."

"That would take a miracle," Sasuke said flatly.

"No it wouldn't," Naruto assured. "It would just take a few magic words, and I happen to have some."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Smiling Naruto leaned down and whispered in Sasuke's ear. "I know you're a traitor."

Best friends

With his words Naruto saw the ever cool Uchiha Sasuke stiffen. There was sudden wild panic in his eyes. It only lasted a couple seconds before he restored the bored façade that was usually there. But it was enough to confirm that Sasori had actually been telling the truth.

"Is that some kind of stupid joke?" Sasuke demanded.

Rather than answer Naruto put a finger to his lips. He then waved to the walls and pointed to his ear. The impromptu message was obvious. 'The walls have ears.'

"Like I already said, the girls thought it funny. You should try and lighten up Sasuke; there are worse fates you know. Well I can see there's no cheering you up so I'll leave you be." He headed towards the door. "When you feel up to it why don't we have a spar? We can go somewhere private and maybe clear a few things up between us."

"I think I'd like that."

"Good," Naruto said cheerily. "Make sure to contact me as soon as you get released, I don't think you want me to get impatient." With that he left.

"Ow! Damn it does it always hurt like this?" Tayuya complained.

"I thought ninja were supposed to be tough." Moka said. "I have bitten Naruto well over a hundred times now. He never complained like you, and after the first few times he never complained at all."

"I can, ow, deal with pain. That doesn't mean I don't fucking feel it."

Moka sent her a cold glance. "What have I told you about your language?"

"Er, sorry Moka-san, it's how I'm used to talking."

"That is no excuse," Moka told her. "A proper servant does not use such foul language. So long as you are here I expect you to be a proper servant."

"And is this, ow, what a servant fu... what a servant does?"

"In your case this is your most important duty."

Kokoa finally let go of her. "Oh! That was so yummy!" She looked over to her older sister. "You were right neesan! I never imagined how much better it would taste fresh from the source. I'm never drinking from a transfusion pack again."

Fresh from the source? What the fuck am I a river stream or something? "Just how often am I going to get bitten?" Tayuya asked.

Kokoa grinned at her. "All the time! Your blood is just so tasty! I'm going to bite you every chance I get!"

Tayuya paled. "Hey! I have limits you know! Even with these things." She took out a bottle of, 'blood pills' used by ninja to help the body restore blood it had lost. "I didn't come all the way here just to die from blood loss."

"You do not need to worry," Moka assured her. "A normal feeding will not take more than about a cup of blood from you, the human body can easily replace that amount in a matter of hours. Those pills are to help you when there are multiple feedings. I won't drink from you when Naruto is in the village, I much prefer his blood. But I will indulge if he is away. Naruto has told you he does not plan to drink from you more than once or twice a week. I'll warn you though, I expect that to change over time as he gets more used to it. For right now the only one who will feed on you regularly will be Kokoa. Since

vampires don't need to feed more than once a day you will be just fine."

"I'm going to drink from her four or five times a day!" Kokoa announced.

Tayuya stared at the little girl's bloody smile and began to whimper.

"You will not Kokoa," Moka sounded firm. "One feeding a day is plenty, anything more is sheer gluttony."

"But I never knew how enjoyable it was!" Kokoa complained. "I always thought humans were pretty much useless. I never knew they could give me such pleasure."

Moka sent her sister a knowing smile. "Actually humans have a *number* of ways to make us feel pleasure, as I'm sure you've seen."

Her little sister began to turn very, very red. "Excuse me I need to go," Kokoa fled the room.

Moka watched her leave with a small smile. *Finally a way to defeat her without a stupid sparing match.* With Kokoa gone she shifted her attention to Tayuya. The girl looked much different in her frilly black and white maid's outfit. With her hair neatly combed and in an outfit that revealed some of her figure she lost much of her tomboyishness and was actually rather cute. "You can begin by taking care of the laundry, then dust and vacuum the rooms I have shown you."

Tayuya looked glum. "So on top of getting my blood sucked I'm really going to be a maid?"

"Of course," Moka replied. "What did you think would happen?"

"Well to be honest I had no idea, but I didn't really think he was going to have me doing laundry and all this other crap."

Moka frowned at her. She clearly did not know her place yet. "My husband tells me he gave you two choices. If you find being a

servant too distasteful the second option remains available."

'A servant or a corpse,' that was the choice he had given her. "I'll get started on the laundry Moka-san."

"So that's what happened, yeah." The astral projection of Deidara brought his report to an end.

In their hidden base Pein and Konan had listened silently from beginning to end. Rein nodded once. "Thank you Deidara, you are free to go."

The blonde was clearly disappointed but accepted his curt dismissal, his image blinked out.

With Deidara no longer present he shared his thoughts with his partner. "First Kisame and Itachi and now Sasori as well. Considering we captured the other eight without a single casualty this is proving rather difficult."

"He is the nine tail demon fox," Konan replied calmly. "I suppose we should have expected him to be more trouble than the others."

"Perhaps," Pein admitted. "But there was certainly no way to foresee this level of difficulty. He is proving himself to be far more dangerous than expected." He paused. "I think a change of tactics is called for."

"What do you have in mind?" Konan asked.

He told her.

"Madara will never agree to that."

"We will see."

A couple days later Naruto was in training ground twenty eight waiting. When Sasuke arrived he had a dour and suspicious look to

him. Naruto on the other hand seemed to be in a fine mood.

"How are you feeling?" Naruto asked pleasantly.

"It only hurts when I laugh," Sasuke responded sourly.

"Really? Then I guess you'll never feel pain again."

Sasuke gave him a hard look. "Just what the hell do you want?"

"You Sasuke, I want you. I want Konoha's golden child to be by very best friend and most loyal servant."

"Me serve you?" Sasuke sneered. "You're just full of stupid jokes aren't you?"

"I wouldn't call treason a joke, and I doubt the Hokage would either. Now *he* really does have no sense of humor."

"If you really do go around telling people I'm a traitor you'll simply be laughed at. Why would I betray my village?"

Naruto gave him a cold smile. "For the promise of a chance to face your older brother. At least that's what Sasori said before he wound down. In exchange for information and loyal service Sasori promised he would betray Itachi to you and give you your chance for vengeance."

Sasuke looked at him coolly and gave away nothing. "You can't possibly have any proof. After all, it's a lie so how could there be proof?"

"You're right I have no proof," Naruto admitted. "Sasori is dead, so all I have is my own testimony of what he said."

"I see," Naruto thought he saw some relief slip through the mask. "Then for your own sake you had best let this go. If you go around accusing me of treason everyone will just think it's your own petty way of getting back at me for what I did to Moka."

"I wouldn't start stories about you for something like that," Naruto assured. "I'd just kill you. I *am* going to kill you for what you did by the way, but I'll use you as much as I can first."

"That's very enlightened of you."

Naruto glared at him, dropping his own mask for a moment. "I'm not *that* enlightened asshole. If I'd been there when it happened I'd have butchered you on the spot. If you had actually managed to sleep with her I'd have killed you the second I got back. As it is I had enough time to calm down. Just trying to do what you did is unforgivable and I will kill you for it, but like I said I'll use you as far as I can first."

"I'm nobody's tool, especially not yours monster!"

Naruto slipped his mask back on and smiled. "That's right, I'm the monster here and you're the golden child. If I accused you of anything no one would ever believe it."

"That's right," Sasuke said.

"So I think I'll have Danzo accuse you instead. He's not exactly well liked but he is respected. I think the Hokage would have no choice but to listen in that case."

"And why would Danzo do that?" Sasuke demanded.

Naruto chuckled. "What, you think you're the only one I have blackmail material on?"

Sasuke ground his teeth but tried to remain apathetic. "Danzo might be better believed but without proof your threat still doesn't have any teeth. I've wasted enough time with this, for your own sake drop this whole thing or I promise I'll turn the whole council against you." He turned to leave.

"Ushina Mayo," Naruto said. Sasuke jerked to a sudden stop. "You recognize that name I see."

"He's just an old man; I took pity on him and gave him a job. He used to be a merchant, I send him to buy certain pieces of art for me. He's just..."

"Your go between who delivers information to Sasori for you." Naruto reached into a pocket and produced a scroll. "After all people would notice if the great Uchiha Sasuke suddenly had to up and leave." He tossed Sasuke the scroll. "Root agents arrested him a couple days ago while you were still in the hospital. It didn't take much to completely break him. That's a copy of his confession."

Sasuke broke open the scroll and read. The information was genuine. They really had taken Mayo then. *If Danzo presents this to the Hokage...*

"You know Sasuke I am shocked, just *shocked* that you could betray your village. I mean you would expect that from someone like me who's just a monster, but for Konoha's beloved golden child to do it?" Naruto shook his head sadly.

Sasuke rolled the scroll back up. "What exactly do you want from me?" He asked quietly.

"Well to start with how about you kneel, bend that stiff neck of yours, and address me as Naruto-sama?"

"Me kneel to you?!" Sasuke screeched.

Naruto smiled cruelly. "That's right; I think you need to know your place. When we're in public I'll treat you with all the respect your adoring fans could want. You'll still be the great Uchiha Sasuke, the golden child, when we're among others. But when we're alone you'll be nothing but my fucking dog. I won't even treat you as well as I would my maid. Now bend your knees and acknowledge me as your lord and master."

"No, never," Sasuke growled. "I'm an Uchiha, I won't submit to anyone."

"Really?" Naruto shrugged and began to walk away. "Well then I hope you enjoy your execution. I'll tell Danzo to see the Hokage immediately."

"Don't try and bluff me, you wouldn't dare."

"Who's bluffing asshole? You tried to fuck my wife, do you think I care whether you live or die? You're already dead, if you prefer to go sooner rather than later that's fine. You've already helped me enough."

"Helped you? What do you mean?"

Naruto stopped to grin at him. "Don't worry about it; it's not something a dead man needs to concern himself with."

"Would you really kill me if I don't kneel?"

"That's right, the only way I'll let you live for now is if you're my obedient little fucking dog! Now submit to me and live for awhile or hang on to that pride of yours as they drag you to the chopping block."

"I... I..." he felt like vomiting. The very idea of kneeling made his sick. But it was the only way. He slowly fell down upon his knees and he bent his neck. But hardest of all was to choke out the words. "Naruto-sama." With his eyes cast down to the ground he heard Naruto's mocking laughter and his shame bit deep.

"There, was that so hard you arrogant prick?" Sasuke said nothing. "All right then, my first order is that you go and see Ino immediately. I want you to beg her forgiveness. Tell her you were out of your mind but now you realize that you love her and need her. I want you to beg her to take you back and marry you."

Sasuke looked up at him startled. "Why?"

"Because idiot girl or not she's head of the Yamanaka clan and a Council member. I want her completely under your control, which means she'll be under my control."

"She won't be head of the Yamanaka clan once she marries me."

"True, so I guess you'll have to schedule the wedding for two or three years from now. Tell her you want to give her the biggest most lavish wedding Konoha has ever seen. As vain as she is I'm sure she'll accept that without a murmur."

Sasuke made a face; he knew how true that was.

"My second order is that you start telling everyone how I forgave you and how you've come to realize that I'm not so awful after all. Tell everyone that we've become friends and work to make them believe it. If I have you loudly supporting me I'll have less trouble from the council." He smiled at his dog / new best friend. "I'll have more orders for you in the future, but that should be a good start. Now you should get going, Ino is probably somewhere crying over you as we speak."

When Jiraiya arrived at the training ground he was surprised to see only Naruto there waiting for him.

"Where's Sasuke?" Jiraiya asked. "You two didn't have a fight did you?"

"Not at all godfather," Naruto said happily. "We just had a really good talk. We've patched our differences and even decided to be friends."

"You did?" Jiraiya found that impossible to believe on a number of levels.

"We sure did! As a matter of fact I think the two of us are going to be best friends!"

Jiraiya eyed him suspiciously. "You certainly are cheerful today, given what happened I hadn't expected that. To be honest I was expecting you to want to kill him."

"Well I'll admit I was a little angry when I first found out, but that was actually useful." He sent Jiraiya a pleased grin. "Want to see?"

Jiraiya shrugged. "Sure."

Naruto transformed himself. His body seemed to mature as his scars faded away and his eyes turned red. His body became surrounded by red chakra as he brought out his cloak.

With five fully formed tails.

Unleash him

"Five tails," the Hokage spoke with a rare satisfaction. "So at long last he is ready."

"Actually about that," Jiraiya spoke. "I would like just a little more time with him."

"More time?" Hiashi frowned. "For what purpose?"

"For the purpose of trying to get his head on straight." Jiraiya sighed. "Maybe it's already a lost cause; it probably has been since I put that damn second seal on him. But I want to see if there's any way I can get through to him."

"No," the Hokage said firmly. "You have had your chance with him. Once this is over you will have more time to work with him. But I will accept no further delays. I have waited years for this moment. Now at long last our ultimate weapon is ready, I will not hesitate to use it."

"And there is the real problem," Jiraiya spoke sadly. "Even now you only see him as a weapon don't you?"

"He *is* a weapon. But more than that he is our salvation and our means of finally triumphing in this miserable war."

"And then what?" Jiraiya asked. "After he's unleashed his full power and annihilated Suna he'll come home and what? Learn to be an upstanding citizen?"

"I do not need you to inform me that the situation with Naruto is less than ideal." The Hokage said coldly. "In an ideal world he would have been accepted and grown up to be like any other loyal leaf nin. But you and I both know that was never the case. Naruto himself freely accepts that he can never be a normal ninja of the village. We must deal with the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. In the end

we can control him and rein him in if needed. And in an extreme emergency we can kill him. That is enough."

"Is it?" Since Naruto's return to the village Jiraiya had been wondering more and more if putting that seal on Naruto had been the worst mistake of his whole life.

"What would you have me do? Hold him here for more training while the fighting continues down near Suna. *You* were the one who originally told me that at the five tail state he would have enough of the Kyuubi's power to be a decisive war winning weapon. He has proven himself against the Sound Four as well as against Akatsuki. He is ready and I mean to unleash him."

Jiraiya hesitated; he knew the suggestion would not meet with the Hokage's approval. But he would bring it up anyway. "Hokage-sama, we have been at war for over four years now. They have suffered even more grievously than we have and are under siege. And with Naruto we have the added advantage of a jinchuuriki. Given these circumstances don't you think it might be possible to negotiate a peace?"

"Negotiate?" Hiashi said in surprise. "Now? At the very moment when we at last have the power to defeat them utterly? Tell me Jiraiya, when the situation was reversed and they were the ones with a jinchuuriki's power did they hesitate to use it? How many times were you forced to fight Gaara? How many ninja did we lose at his hands?"

"Too damn many, but Gaara's dead, Suna is under siege, and now they'll have to face Naruto who has a hell of a lot more raw power now than Gaara ever did. Given all that if we made them a reasonable proposal..."

"They betrayed us and broke a sacred treaty. They joined hands with Orochimaru to attack this village and to kill Sarutobi." The Hokage reminded him. "Have you forgotten all that Jiraiya?"

"Of course not, but..."

The Hokage continued. "The Council demanded unconditional surrender and Suna refused. When I became Hokage I swore an oath that I would gain either their unconditional surrender or their total destruction, and one or the other I mean to have. Before Naruto leads the attack I give you permission to offer them one last chance to surrender, but there will be no negotiation."

Jiraiya regretfully nodded. He *knew* this was going to be a mistake. But he also knew that there was nothing he could say or do to change the Hokage's mind.

"Leave tomorrow morning with Naruto and bring us victory."

"You know Naruto-kun you can be surprisingly sentimental at times." Moka teased a bit.

He grinned and rubbed the back of his head. "Ah, you don't mind do you Moka-chan?"

Smiling she gently took his arm. "Of course not, it's one of the many things I love about you." She was dressed in a snow white uchikake kimono. Her face was covered in face powder and blush and her silver hair was done up. He in turn was dressed in a traditional dark brown montsuki kimono. "I do wonder about the timing though."

"Well we didn't get the chance to do this when we got married. Hinata and I did it and so did my parents. I just really want to have a wedding portrait with the two of us. I want to put it right in the grand hallway where everyone will see it."

She looked at him a little worried. "What I mean is that you are about to leave for war. Doing something like this just as your about to go... there's no hidden message there I hope."

"Of course not! I just want to do this before I leave so I can come home and see it already hanging there." He smiled at her. "Do you really think anything could ever keep me from coming back to you?"

She smiled and gave him a quick kiss, careful not to smudge her make up. "No, you did make a promise after all."

He nodded. *We will never be apart again.* He had promised her. *Whatever happens Moka-chan, I'll always come back to you.*

A very nervous photographer asked if they were ready. Nodding they stood close together and took their wedding portrait.

Before dawn Jiraiya, Sasuke, Naruto, Moka, Hinata, and Ino gathered at the gate. Ino was weeping and being very emotional as she wrapped herself about her beloved fiancé and pleaded with him to return safely to her. Sasuke sent Naruto a hooded look, but put his arms around her and deliberately showed her as much warmth and caring as he could fake.

"Please take care of yourself Naruto-kun," Hinata told him. "I know how strong you are but it will be very dangerous. The sand nins are a terrible enemy."

"Thanks Hinata-chan, I'll be fine." He gave her a hug, even if he didn't love her had come to really care for her.

He turned to Moka and grinned confidently. "I'll be back before you know it," he assured her.

Wrapping her arms around him she kissed him. "I know you will my beloved I have no doubt about that at all." They shared another slow kiss as she felt his strong arms holding her close. "Return to me well and unharmed my beloved, that is all that I ask."

"I will Moka-chan." He kissed her once more. "I'll always return to you."

Jiraiya looked on the scene silently. It was moments like these; those rare glimpses of Naruto behaving as any normal man would that hurt him most. *Would he be normal if I had just stayed to watch over him?* He would never know of course, but the possibility filled him with shame.

"All right," Jiraiya called out. "Let's go you two. The sooner we leave the sooner we bring everything to an end."

As Moka stood there watching him go she was relieved that she had held back her tears until he'd gone.

The Godaime Kazekage stared into the mirror.

She had once been called the rose of the desert and been considered one of the great beauties of her village. That had been before she'd gotten the burn scar that covered most of the left side of her face. That also been before she'd gotten half her nose cut off. Not even the most generous person would call her beautiful now.

Subaku no Temari turned from the mirror unconcerned. The scars on her body were nothing compared to the ones that marked her heart. Like everyone else in the village she had suffered loss from war. She'd lost her father before it had even officially begun; he'd been murdered by their supposed ally that snake Orochimaru. Then during that first bloody attack on the leaf village her brother Gaara had been wounded and nearly killed by that damn Jiraiya. All the participants that day, Sand, Sound, and Leaf had suffered heavy losses. There'd been talk of making peace with leaf after that.

As Temari left her mansion with her escort she thought back to those chaotic days right after the first battle. With her father dead the Council of Wind had been in power. The Leaf nins had also lost their leader and were temporarily in the hands of their council as well. Konoha had sent them a demand of unconditional surrender; but one that would be in name only. No reparations, no hostages, and no surrender of territory. It would have been a surrender in name only.

All the leaf nins had demanded back then was that they bend knee and admit defeat. The council had been split between those that wanted to accept the offer and those who had wanted to fight on. In the end the peace faction had won out and they were about to send Konoha word of their surrender.

Then Gaara had walked into their meeting. He had simply stood there a moment and looked at all of them with that cold hard stare of his. He'd spoken in that soft polite voice that was always straining on the edge of sanity. "If any of you try to stop this war I'll kill you." And then he had turned around and left.

With that the best chance for peace was gone.

Shortly after that the Council had asked Kankuro to be Kazekage. The reason was not that they had any faith in his leadership skills; they believed he would be best suited to keeping Gaara at least somewhat under control. Kankuro had laughed at them and told them to ask her instead. She hadn't wanted the job; unlike her father she had no desire to rule others. She had just wanted to help serve and defend her village as a kunoichi. But the council had pleaded with her and her sense of duty would not let her refuse. And so she'd become Kazekage.

The war had gone fairly well. Despite the mounting losses most of the battles took place in Fire country. It was their towns and village that got destroyed, their fields that got burnt, their civilians that suffered. And though they could never decisively defeat them, so long as they had Gaara they held the advantage. She had truly believed that they would win. The only enemy that could face Gaara was Jiraiya and she was sure her brother would kill him eventually.

Then one day her brother had been captured by Akatsuki on his way back to the village. The moment she'd gotten word she'd led a large force out to find him. She could still remember finding his escort, they'd all died.

Except for Kankuro.

He'd still been alive when she'd found him, but poisoned. She'd gotten him back to Suna and proper medical care. She had even gotten that miserable old crone Chiyo to take a look at him. But there was nothing that could be done. The old harpy had even told her that the only one who could save him was Tsunade! As though that helped! Kankuro had held on for three days drifting in and out of consciousness. For once she had put her duty to her family ahead of her duty to her village. She stayed at his side and did what she could for him. She held his hand, talked to him and tried to comfort him. She held his hand as he died.

The next day her scouts found Gaara's body discarded in a cave. When the news came half of Suna celebrated while the other half feared what the leaf nins would do to them with Gaara gone now. No one had mourned for Gaara. Not even her.

Though heartbroken Temari had done her duty, what she thought was best for her village. She sent a message to Konoha asking for peace terms. The answer she'd gotten back had shocked her. The Hokage still wanted unconditional surrender, but it would be a *real* surrender. They would have to pay half a billion ryu in reparations, surrender hostages, give up the right to wage war without the leaf's permission, and their ninja would not be allowed to take contracts outside of Wind country. In essence the terms would have reduced Suna to a third rate power in service to Konoha. Accepting such terms was out of the question so the war had continued.

As she had feared, without Gaara they began to suffer a series of defeats. Soon their army was driven out of Fire country and it was *their* civilians who began to suffer as the Leaf nins took revenge for what they had happened in Fire country. Ultimately her forces had been pushed all the way back to Suna itself. The village was under siege. Despite that she had confidence they could hold on. Her village was located in a massive cul de sac with high cliff walls and only a single entrance running through them. Nature had given them a fortress no man made creation could hope to rival. They had food stores and water to last over a year. The leaf nins had tried a couple

of assaults that had ended in slaughter. Their defenses were much too strong to be taken. She was sure she could eventually wear them down to the point of accepting a reasonable peace.

Then had come the news that they held the Kyuubi's jinchuuriki. If that was true then she was not sure any defense would do. Her fear of the Kyuubi was the *only* reason she'd agreed to this secret meeting. As they entered the Tower of Wind She looked at the man who was walking beside her, he was the only one she completely trusted.

"I can't believe this," she muttered furiously. "I should have them all killed now while I have the chance."

"But what if their intelligence is accurate and this Naruto is already on his way here?" Baki answered softly. "Can we defeat him along with Jiraiya and the rest of them?"

"And what happens if we have to face these bastards later?" Temari demanded.

Baki shrugged wearily. "You have only a choice of evils. They offer aid, if you reject then we will not receive help from any other quarter. We will have to face the Kyuubi alone."

She growled a bit, absolutely hating what she was doing. "It's for the good of the village. If I thought we could hold out against the Kyuubi along with everything else..." She shook her head. The forces of Suna were a shadow of what they had been when this war started. They were only able to hold on now because they were fighting from such strong positions. But if this Naruto was anything like Gaara was that would make no difference. "Damn it all, I have to accept their help."

"The Kazekage is wise," Baki said.

"Like hell I am," Temari snorted. "If I were so damn wise we wouldn't be in this mess to begin with."

The two of them came to a conference room surrounded by no less than three squads of ANBU. At her approach they stepped aside. She opened the doors and entered with Baki. She then shut them.

Inside three individuals came to their feet and bowed.

They all had black robes with red clouds.

Bargain with the devil

The three of them had stopped by a small muddy stream to get some water. As Naruto filled his canteen he noted the ruined buildings that surrounded them. The stream was only about ankle deep but a fair sized town had sprung up on either side of it. A few of the simple were almost intact, except for the roofs and doors. Mostly there would be one or two walls and a pile of adobe bricks.

"You know we've seen more burned out villages than we have people for the last two days," Naruto commented.

Sasuke smirked. "The army came through here on the way south. You saw what they did in Fire country; we were just returning the favor."

That was true, the burned out villages had started well north of the border. In fact it was impossible to even tell where the border was based on the villages and towns. One empty ruin pretty much looked like any other. "Very open minded of you," Naruto said. "I wonder if the people whom used to live here appreciated it."

"What the hell do you care?" Sasuke snapped. "You don't seem to mind killing the civilians in our own village. Why should you care about the enemy civilians?"

"I don't care," Naruto replied as he screwed on the lid to his canteen. "I was just noticing that you can't tell the difference between our actions and theirs."

"War is war Naruto," Jiraiya said. "This is the second war I have fought in, and it's always the same. No matter where no matter when, it's always the weak who suffer the worst. And all for the sake of a man's ambitions."

"Whose ambitions?" Naruto asked curiously. "Orochimaru's? The Kazekage's? The Hokage's?"

"What does it matter anymore?" Jiraiya replied wearily. "To all the people who used to live in all these villages what does it matter?"

"They don't matter," Sasuke said firmly. "You do what you have to do to destroy the enemy. And if some innocents get in the way?" He shrugged. "It's just part of the price."

"Oh I agree with you there," Naruto said cheerfully. "I'll gladly pay any price for revenge."

Jiraiya looked at him a little worriedly. "You mean for *victory* don't you?"

Naruto gave him a cold smile. "Isn't it really all the same? Call it victory or call it revenge it all looks the same in the end doesn't it?" He waved at the ruins.

Jiraiya found that answer and that attitude troubling.

They arrived an hour after sunset. Camp Hiashi was little more than miles and miles of open space filled with tents. The area was surrounded by a ditch and a flimsy barricade of wooden stakes. There were only a handful of actual buildings made of adobe bricks. The camp was just a mile from the cliffs that guarded the one and only pathway into Suna. Even under the light of a half moon it was easy to make out the hundreds of balconies and terraces that had been cut into the cliff wall. Behind each was a cave entrance that connected to a complex series of tunnels. Using these the defenders could easily move troops to and from threatened area. They could disappear only to pop up again behind their opponent. It was an ideal defensive position.

Taking all this in Naruto turned to Jiraiya as they entered camp. "This camp's defenses look pretty damn flimsy. Aren't you worried about a

sneak attack?"

Jiraiya shook his head. "There are over a thousand leaf nins here, and we keep a careful watch at all hours. We'd welcome an attack; if we could get them out in the open we'd slaughter them. The problem is they *won't* attack us; instead we have to dig them out of the cliff face. Every time we've tried it's been a disaster."

"Which is why I'm here," Naruto said with a grin.

"Yes," Jiraiya looked at him consideringly. "I'll meet with their Kazekage tomorrow morning to give them one last chance at surrender. If the offer is refused, and I expect it will be, **you** will lead our assault."

Naruto chuckled. "The chance to completely destroy a ninja village. I'm looking forward to it." *I'll call this practice.*

High atop the cliff Temari looked down on the hundreds of campfires that were burning in the enemy camp. Around those fires better than a thousand leaf nins were talking and laughing, no doubt confident that the Kyuubi's jinchuuriki would lead them to victory. She had less than two hundred ninja with which to stop them.

Nearby a familiar form materialized from a swirl of wind and sand. "Kazekage-sama," Baki spoke. "We have just received a message from leaf. They request a temporary cease fire so that they may parlay."

Temari nodded tiredly. "That's fine, when do they want to meet?"

"Just after sunrise."

She again nodded. That would give them all day to attack. "I don't suppose they gave you any hint that they might actually want to offer us real terms."

Baki hesitated and that was all the answer she needed.

"Never mind," Temari said. "Their terms haven't changed since Gaara died, why would they change now?" She paused and looked out into the night sky. In the desert the stars always seemed to be close enough to touch. *There's so much beauty here, even now.* "This isn't what he had in mind you know."

"Pardon Kazekage-sama?"

She turned from the night sky to look at him. "My predecessor, the Fourth Kazekage. He never wanted a war to the death; all he wanted was to weaken Konoha so they wouldn't be able to compete with us."

"Yes, that is so," Baki answered sadly. *She still refuses to call him father. Perhaps it is only proper she refer to him by title. He truly was a great Kazekage but poor father.*

"Orochimaru was the one who wanted to destroy Konoha. Gaara didn't give a damn, for him the war was just an excuse to try and kill Jiraiya. Despite everything they've done I don't want to destroy them. I'd be willing to make peace, so long as it was a reasonable peace."

"It is a pity the Hokage does not feel the same."

"Have I done the right thing Baki?" She looked at him pleadingly. "Tell me the truth. I know that I have made a bargain with the devil and I know how bargains like that usually end."

"You did what you had to Kazekage-sama," Baki tried to reassure her. "Truly, what other choice was there?"

"I could have accepted the Leaf's terms."

He looked at her in shock. She'd had people arrested for saying that. "To accept the terms would be to ruin Suna forever, you know this to be so Kazekage-sama."

"That's true," Temari admitted. "But is that better or worse than this devil's bargain I've made?"

Baki stared at her. "You are the Kazekage; you must decide what is best for the village. But for myself I would rather die fighting than see my homeland conquered."

She nodded and grinned a bit at her old teacher. *I can always count on you sensei to tell me what you truly think.* "Send a message to the leaf nins that I will grant them their cease fire and will go out to parlay."

He bowed to her. "Hai Kazekage-sama." He disappeared in a swirl of wind and sand.

Temari remained where she was and turned back towards the stars.

In a small house under heavy guard Pein, Konnan, and Tobi sat about waiting patiently. They had performed several sealing jutsus that closed off the building from any sort of monitoring. They had promised the Kazekage that only three members would enter her village. So when Zetsu slowly emerged from out of the floor it was important that they were the only ones to know it.

"Report," Pein ordered.

The black and white ninja looked at him. "He's here; he arrived with Jiraiya and Sasuke."

Pein nodded. "Right on schedule."

"Tobi is happy that things are on schedule!"

"There's a problem though," Zetsu spoke in a second, slightly deeper voice. "It seems as though the Kazekage is having second thoughts about our agreement."

"Oh no! Tobi doesn't like that at all."

"Does she intend to betray us?" Konan asked.

"Who knows," Zetsu replied in his first voice. "She didn't come right out and say she would. She just seems to have doubts."

"It does not matter," Pein said firmly. "Whether she means to break our agreement or not the plan can simply be adjusted. All that matters is that we achieve our goal of capturing the nine tails."

"What sort of adjustment do you have in mind?" Konan asked.

"Nothing of importance," Pein answered. "We shall simply..."

As they listened he adjusted the plan accordingly.

The desert was a land of extremes with bitterly cold nights followed by scorching days. The sun had come up and the day was already growing hot. Konoha's ninja had eaten and come out of their camp and formed ranks. They all knew what was coming. Every eye drifted to where Jiraiya and Naruto stood.

"So what happens if they actually agree to the terms?" Naruto asked curiously.

"Then we'll end the war and make arrangements to ensure the terms are carried out."

"Then I wouldn't get to fight?" Naruto sounded disappointed.

Jiraiya looked at him. "I've seen a lot more war than you have. Believe me; ending it without any further fighting would be a good thing."

"For you maybe," Naruto muttered. "Personally, I want to see just how much damage I can do."

"I wouldn't worry about it," Jiraiya said. "I'm sure you'll get your chance. Like I said I don't expect them to accept."

With that Jiraiya lifted a pole with a white flag attached to it. Alone he slowly began walking out in the empty ground ahead of him.

From the cliff a single figure also began to slowly advance while holding a flag of truce.

As Temari walked out she saw that it was Jiraiya who was going to meet her. *It would have to be that bastard wouldn't it?* She'd faced him many times and witness most of the battles he'd had against her brother. No other enemy ninja did she respect even half as much. He'd been the only one to ever defeat her brother in battle, that alone put him in a class by himself. But no matter how much she respected him she still hated his guts. His defeats of Gaara had pushed him further and further into madness and paranoia. That first defeat had sent Gaara running and kept her village from ending the war in a single stroke. In so many ways it was Jiraiya who was responsible for the continuation of this war.

Deep down she knew it was stupid to blame Jiraiya. After all he'd only done what every ninja on either side had done, fought to the best of his ability. The truth was that if any single person was to blame for the continuation of the war it had to be Hiashi with his insistence on his harsh terms and his refusal to negotiate.

As she continued to walk towards the parlay her outward appearance was calm but her mind was anything but. This parlay was the last, the absolute last, chance to stop things before the Kyuubi and Akatsuki became involved. She kept coming back to the same question, was it better to suffer certain defeat and disgrace now or risk far worse someday in the future? She had no illusions that Akatsuki were or could be friends. They were criminals without honor or decency. They had acquired the power of eight of the nine biju, and were here now only because the last biju was as well. She had no idea what they intended to do with the biju they had

collected, but it could not be for anything she would want. How could she deliberately help them? The men who had killed both her brothers?

But to refuse their help, to accept the terms and make peace. Wouldn't that be a betrayal too? Her duty as Kazekage was to do whatever was best for the village. If she could prevent her village's defeat and humiliation didn't she owe it not only to the ninja but to the common villagers to do just that? If she accepted the terms Suna would be occupied and forced to become Konoha's willing servant. They would never again be a great village. How could she allow that to happen if she had the power to prevent it?

What should she do?

As she opened her mouth to greet Jiraiya she had still not decided.

Jiraiya was about to greet her when the ground at her feet ripped open. A ninja dressed all in black leapt out. His hand transformed into a blade and before anything could be done it sliced into Temari's belly. Jiraiya wordlessly shouted as it neatly sliced up into her rib cage and all the way to her throat before it came out of her body. Her blood splattered ten, fifteen feet into the air as she collapsed onto the dusty ground. The sudden attack had been too fast and too brutal for her even to cry out. With the way her body was torn open there could be no doubt that she was dead. The attacking ninja turned his face to him. He had a leaf hitai-ite around his forehead, but that was not what caught Jiraiya's attention. In the couple seconds he had to look he saw the man's eyes clearly. Multiple circles surrounded both pupils.

The man had the rinnegan.

Before Jiraiya could act the ninja dived back into the ground and was gone. It had been a perfect assassination and ambush.

From across the way screams of fury and betrayal rose up. Jiraiya was forced to leap back as a hail of kunai and other weapons descended upon him. Tossing aside his flag of truce he fled back to his own lines.

Jiraiya could see the looks on the faces of the leaf nins. Most of them were surprised and a few looked disgusted. But a good many looked very pleased.

Naruto's grin was one of the biggest. He was even clapping his hands. "Nice set up! She really never saw it coming did she? Was it your idea or the Hokage's?"

"This wasn't any of our doing! I'm as surprised at what happened as you are."

Naruto laughed. "Suuuuure, you had no idea what was going to happen."

It was the truth, but he was certain no one would believe it on either side. To both the sand and leaf nins it was obvious the Kazekage had been assassinated during a parlay. A disgraceful act to be sure, but not one without precedence. Sadly Jiraiya knew there was nothing that words could do now. Whatever tiny chance had still been left for peace was gone.

He turned to Naruto. "All right, you know what to do."

"Oh yeah, I know what to do." Naruto smiled as his scars faded away and his body matured. He was surrounded by his red chakra cloak. Five tails twisted back and forth above his head. In both hands white fire began to burn. "I'll kill them all."

He ran forward alone towards the cliff... laughing.

In your debt

Whenever he felt the power surging through him like this he always felt more alive. Colors were brighter, scents were sharper, and emotions were heightened. The excitement of taking on a whole damn village by himself was making his heart race and filling him with pure joy. In his vampiric form he moved so fast as to almost be a blur. Even though the enemy knew he was coming his speed surprised them. Some kunai and explosive notes were hastily thrown at him, but they all missed landing well behind him. Before they were even ready he'd reached the cliff wall and was scaling it. While a vampire he could not use chakra to run up the side, but with his strength and agility he could climb nearly as fast.

As he climbed up towards the first series of defended balconies some kunai finally hit their target. These bounced away harmlessly after striking his cloak. Some of the kunai had explosive notes attached and detonated as they struck, but while more showy they had no affect either. When he was almost to the first line he heard a clacking sound. A pair of man sized puppets leapt out at him, one was a giant spider and the other a scorpion. Both puppets began firing kunai and smoke bombs at him, the spider also fired off a sticky white paste. The kunai bounced off, the smoke bombs (which were undoubtedly poisoned) exploded all around him to no effect, the paste struck him and actually held him up for a second or two, until he burned it away.

"Is that the best you can do?" He called out contemptuously. "You think these toys will stop me?" The puppets charged right at him. He simply struck them and reduced them to kindling. "You're going to have to do better than that!"

As if in reply he was suddenly buffeted by winds from not one but a dozen different jutsus. The jutsus were enough to cut up boulders and send a storm of sand and rock flying at him, but they could penetrate his cloak.

Better, but still not good enough. For Naruto this really was a test to see just what he could do when facing many enemy ninja. Despite their best efforts to keep him back he leapt up and onto the first series of balconies that had been cut into the cliff. He was face to face with six Suna nin. They came straight at him as bravely as you could wish. Rather than use his fire he decided to take them on hand to hand, relying on his speed, strength, and the protection of his cloak. He tore open their throats and punched holes clean through their chests. They lasted only a few seconds against him.

He raced up to the second balcony. Here ten enemy ninja waited for him. This time he decided to use fire. He sent a wall of white flame out at them. A couple of them tried to duck behind some stone while the others tried to leap away. It didn't save any of them. After another handful of seconds he was headed for the third line.

"He's really tearing them apart," Sasuke said in a low voice. "Not even I..."

Jiraiya noticed the way his student's fists curled up and began to shake a bit. *He really can't stand to admit anyone is stronger than he is.* "This is the reason everything we did with Naruto was done. All of it was aimed towards this day."

Sasuke looked at him. "And what happens after today?"

"What do you mean? He is a ninja of the leaf and clan head of the Namikaze. After today he will continue to serve the village."

"By killing civilians and putting everyone in fear of him?" Sasuke asked plainly.

"I'm sure things will improve with time." Even to his own ears Jiraiya thought that sounded weak.

Sasuke smirked. "Right, I'm sure if Gaara had lived he'd have improved too."

"Gaara was insane," Jiraiya reminded him.

"And Naruto's a symbol of good mental health?" Sasuke snapped. "He goes around burning people alive if they look at him the wrong way. How exactly is that different from what Gaara used to do?"

"Naruto has his reasons," Jiraiya said sadly. He wondered yet *again* how different things might have been if he had only stayed. "I'm sure with time things will get better."

"They'd be better if he were gone." Sasuke said carefully. "If something were to happen..."

"Don't say it Sasuke!" Jiraiya cut him off sharply. "Whatever else he may be Naruto **is** a fellow leaf ninja. Don't say something that would force me to arrest you."

"Hn." Sasuke looked away.

Jiraiya looked back to where Naruto was still slaughtering the enemy.

By the time he'd reached the fifth line the balcony was empty. The Suna nins had fled into the tunnels carved into the cliff. He stood in front of one of the tunnel entrances and laughed. *They're like a bunch of rabbits running into their burrows to get away from a hungry fox.* There were undoubtedly traps and ambushes set up within those tunnels. No doubt they were waiting for him to come in after them. *Too bad for them I don't need to. Time to flush out the rabbits.* He held out both hands and began pouring an endless stream of fire down into the tunnels.

Soon screams began to echo along the cliff side and fire began to *exit* from other tunnel entrances. He was filling up their entire tunnel system with fire. It was too much, and soon the remaining survivors began to race out of the tunnels. It was over, they no longer had the

will to try and face him. The pitiful remains of the army of Suna began to flee back towards their village.

Naruto finally cut off the fire and got set to give chase. From behind he heard a massive shout. Looking back he could see a thousand Leaf nins charging across the empty field. *Of course*, he thought with annoyance. *Now that I've completely broken them they want to deliver the death blow. But I'll still be the first one into Suna.*

Naruto did indeed get the honor of being the first leaf nin to enter Suna. He got a wonderful view of it from the tip of the cliff. The village was not as large as Konoha and since everything was made of the same brown bricks it was not as pleasing to the eye. But it was his to play with now. The whole damn village was his. Those very same cliffs that had protected Suna up until now also meant there was no where they could run to, they were all trapped. He leapt down and began setting various buildings on fire, delighting in his power and in the sight of all those lovely flames.

Soon the rest of the leaf ninja began to pour in, they were no merciful. After four long bitter years of war they wanted to see Suna burn even more than he did.

Naruto raced forward and headed toward the largest building in sight, the Tower of Wind. He wanted to be the one to destroy it. Since entering the village itself he hadn't had to do any more fighting. Everyone was running or trying to hide. He leapt across the roof tops heading for the tower. He had almost reached it when a figure in a black robe with red clouds appeared in front of him. The figure was also wearing an orange mask.

Naruto came to an abrupt halt and faced his new opponent. "Uchiha Madara I presume, or are you pretending to be Tobi right now?"

"Interesting, I had thought my identity secure." He slowly removed his orange mask. The dark haired man had red eyes already filled with the mangekyo sharingan. "How did you know?"

"Itachi told me," Naruto answered. He sent a gout of white fire at his opponent. Madara made no move to dodge. Instead he allowed the fire to pass through him. "I see what he said about your abilities was true. You really can become intangible at will."

Madara nodded. "I am disappointed that Itachi would betray me, though not too surprised. Still, if that is the case it is best to make a quick end to this."

Naruto felt himself suddenly weaken and being drawn out of his own body.

The next thing he knew he was standing across from Madara out on what seemed like an endless plain. Madara looked about for a moment.

"Interesting, I can sense the Kyuubi's power flowing through you. Yet I cannot sense his personality anywhere within your mind. How did you manage that?"

"Again, that was Itachi's doing." Naruto answered.

Madara shook his head. "I never thought he would go so far to try and oppose me."

"Oh, he really hated your guts. He was determined to stop you and save his brother and his village from you."

"Yet he failed." Madara said. "I have cut you off from the Kyuubi's power, and now I will shatter your mind. I will then carry you from this place and draw out the Kyuubi's power. Despite his efforts to combat me Itachi failed."

Naruto smiled as an ache built up behind his eyes. "Actually he suspected you might be forced to come after me yourself. So he took one more precaution." From out of Naruto's eyes came a black fire. **Amaterasu** was a technique of the mangekyo that consumed whatever it touched. Someone like Naruto who lacked a sharingan

should not have been able to use it. But of course, those rules did not apply outside the physical world. In the realm of the mind all things were possible.

Madara had made the fatal assumption that having brought Naruto into this mindscape he would be powerless. He had never imagined that Itachi could leave a trap for him. In the instant he had he tried to dodge and was instead consumed.

Naruto found himself again standing on the roof. His cloak was gone and he felt considerably weaker with the Kyuubi's power temporarily suppressed. Across from him Madara was lying on his back staring up into the sky.

Before Naruto could act he felt a horrible sheering pain tearing into him. He saw and felt a huge metal blade burst out of his stomach. He screamed and bent over, he was unable to fall as the blade held him up. In blinding pain he looked about to see seven figures surrounding him, all of them in black robes with red clouds. One was a woman with dark blue hair and a paper rose in it. The rest were men who all shared eyes with multiple circles ringing the pupil, the rinnegan.

"Pein and Konan," he gasped. Looking behind him one of the men had a thick chain extending out from a sleeve to where the blade had gone through his back. Naruto was hooked like a damn fish. As he watched one of the men, a tall blocky one, came to stand at his side.

"Very impressive," the man with orange hair, the 'true' Pein, spoke. He carefully knelt down beside the incapacitated Madara to check on him. "How did you defeat Madara?"

"I'm full of surprises!" He lifted a hand. Even without access to the Kyuubi's power he still had his own. He willed a pure white fire to reduce the two of them to ash. The flames formed within his palm but immediately faded away.

"I am afraid that won't work, and neither will any other jutsu you try and use." He nodded to the fellow standing next to him. "His ability is to absorb the energy of any kind of attack."

Naruto tried to leap away, but all he got for his effort was more agony. He really was hooked.

"Given reports we've had on you, as well as previous experience with other jinchuuriki, your healing ability will keep you from dying." Pein told him.

Naruto glared at him. The last time he'd been in this bad a situation he'd needed Moka to save him. She was a thousand miles away now. "Tell me, did I at least kill him?" He nodded to Madara.

"No," Pein answered. "But you have incapacitated him, and for that I thank you." Pein took out a kunai and without ceremony slit Madara's throat.

Even with his own grim circumstances Naruto was shocked by the casual act. "You killed him! I thought he was your leader."

"He was," Pein confirmed. "But that was due solely to the fact he was stronger than I was. It was always my intention to remove him the moment he showed himself to be vulnerable."

It was funny; he would have laughed if he weren't in such agony. "Ah, so much for honor among thieves I guess."

"I am as honorable as the situation allows." Pein said. "For your aid I promise you will be rendered unconscious and kept that way. Your death will be painless, I promise you."

"That's nice of you." Naruto tried to yank free of the huge blade but all his strength seemed to be fading.

That was when a huge tongue slammed into him. The very next second he was being yanked off the roof and into the air. He was still

attached and the weird other ninja was yanked away as well. The drag of the other body caused him to scream again.

Looking up he saw a gigantic frog and a certain white haired ninja riding on top of the frog's head. As he and the Akatsuki were being held out helplessly in the air Jiraiya formed a massive rasengan in the palm of his hand. Jiraiya leapt up and drove the gigantic jutsu into his opponent's face and literally tore him apart.

"Get us out of here Bunta!"

The giant frog leapt away putting distance between himself and the remaining members of Akatsuki.

Pein could only stare at the retreating figure of Gamabunta.

"What do we do now?" Konan asked.

"I'm afraid we have no choice, we can't fight Jiraiya and the entire Leaf army. We'll retreat for now. This will have to wait for another day."

As one the Akatsuki disappeared.

Riding on top of Gamabunta's head Naruto looked up at Jiraiya who seemed very worried. Seeing that made him want to laugh.

"I'm not going to die," he assured him. "It would take a lot more than a hunk of metal through my guts to finish me."

Jiraiya slowly nodded. "I'm taking you to the medic nins; they'll take that blade out of you and help heal you."

Naruto continued to stare up at him. "Why?" he asked.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Why are you trying to save me? I've won the damn war for you. I've fulfilled my purpose. If you're worried about the Akatsuki getting the Kyuubi's power then you should just kill me now. You'll never have a better chance."

Jiraiya looked at him sickened. "Naruto, you're my godson, the only son of someone who I loved. I would never try to kill you."

Grinning he slowly placed a hand over his heart. "Well, not without orders at least."

Jiraiya looked away and said nothing.

"Thank you for saving me godfather, I owe you my life." He said quietly. *Damn it, I'm in his debt now. Well, that just means I'll have to protect his life when the time comes.*

As Jiraiya took Naruto to safety the sacking of Suna continued all around them. The great ninja village would burn all through the night. It was the first time in almost fifty years that one of the, 'great' ninja villages had been destroyed.

But it would not be the last.

Fireworks

Naruto was lying down on the roof of his mansion with his head resting in Moka's lap. Moka was playfully running her hands through his thick hair. It was dark now and the summer heat was finally dissipating a bit. Naruto shut his eyes and enjoyed the feeling of a cool breeze gusting past. He liked these times, when he could just relax and be alone with Moka. In the distance he could hear the faded cheers and the faint echo of music, the sounds of celebration.

"You don't mind celebrating like this do you Moka-chan?"

"Of course not my beloved," he could feel her fingers gently tracing the scars on his cheeks. "There is no better way to celebrate than to be alone with you."

He opened his eyes to look up into her beautiful face. "I know how much you enjoy festivals." He recalled the fun they'd had at Youkai academy's festival before Itachi's arrival. "If you want we can put on henges and..."

Moka shook her head. "No Naruto-kun, if you do not feel comfortable then I much prefer this." She looked a bit angry. "Though I admit it offends me that the Hokage invited so many to attend the festivities with him, but not you. They should all be honoring you as their great hero; instead they grant you no special honors, not even a place at the celebration."

He chuckled a bit. "Now that the fighting's over I'm sure they'd all like to pretend that I don't exist."

"Despicable," she muttered angrily.

"As long as they don't try and burn my house down it's fine." He looked out upon the village. From his roof top he had a perfect view

of not just the village but of the Hokage monument as well. "They can enjoy themselves for tonight."

Moka looked at him thoughtfully. "You know we have the mansion to ourselves tonight. You were kind enough to grant Tayuya a night off, Kokoa heard there would be free alcohol served at the plaza and couldn't leave fast enough, and Hinata is attending with her father. Interesting that *she* was given an invitation but not you."

"Nothing wrong with that, she's his daughter after all. While I am..." he paused for a bit. "Hmmm, well what am I? A monster I suppose, a demon, or maybe just a necessary evil."

"You should be their hero," Moka said firmly. "You brought them a swift victory and end to their war, and nearly died for them."

He chuckled. "Oh, I'm sure that there are a lot of people upset that I *nearly* died. As for being a hero to these people? That'll never happen, and it's not something I care about any way. I might have wanted it once, but not any more."

She continued to run her fingers lightly over his face. "You and Hinata seem to have grown closer."

"Maybe a little," he admitted.

The Day Before

There was a knock on her bedroom door. "Please come in Naruto-kun."

Naruto opened the door to see Hinata sitting demurely at a small table. She was wearing a dark blue kimono and had her hair up, she looked quite beautiful. On the table were a tea kettle and two porcelain cups and saucers. Hinata nodded to him and motioned to the other chair at the table. "Won't you please join me Naruto-kun?"

He shut the door and carefully sat down across from her. He was in his regular black ninja clothing and felt a bit under dressed. "Is there some special occasion I didn't know about? You don't usually ask to talk with the real me."

"For most things I am happy to be with one of your clones, but for certain occasions I think it best to be with the true person." She lifted the kettle. "Will you have tea with me Naruto-kun?"

"Of course."

"You like yours without sugar or milk." He nodded, he'd had tea with her many times before, at least his clones had. She filled his cup with steaming hot green tea and then filled her own. She put a couple spoonfuls of sugar into her cup and began to stir it. "I've noticed that Moka likes hers the same way. The two of you seem to share a lot of tastes."

"That's true I suppose," he blew on the hot tea before taking a sip. It had a strong herbal flavor to it that reminded him of the forest in the spring time. "Your tea is always really good Hinata-chan. But was there a reason you asked me to come here?"

She took a sip of her own before setting the cup and saucer back down. "Did you know that the tea ceremony was originally created to help warring lords to make peace? Enemies would come together and share tea as a symbolic way of sharing peace and brotherhood."

Naruto smiled a bit and took another sip. "I believe the ancient emperor Xian Hu was the first to practice it." Hinata gave him a look of open surprise. "You learn some interesting things living with a teacher for four years. Iruka sensei made it a point to teach me everything he could, not just things about how to be a ninja."

She smiled a bit and nodded. "I'm sure if Iruka were here now he would be very proud of you."

"I'd like to think so." Naruto answered quietly. He looked at her and sipped his tea again. "So are you trying to make peace with me Hinata-chan? I don't recall us being at war."

"I do want to talk to you about peace Naruto-kun, but not between us. I want to discuss peace between you and the villagers."

"Ah, now I get it. You want me to leave the poor helpless villagers alone?" He set his cup down. "Is that it?"

She slowly nodded. "Yes Naruto-kun, I know the issues you've had with them. But all that was years ago. Konoha is finally at peace now, mostly thanks to you. The villagers are no threat to you; couldn't you find it in your heart to just leave them be?"

He gave her a big smile that had no warmth to it at all. "You mean the way they let me be when I was helpless?"

"Naruto-kun things have changed since then."

"Yeah they have, I'm not helpless anymore."

"That's right Naruto-kun," Hinata looked at him pleadingly. "You're the one with the power now. The people in the village can't hurt you any more. Can't you show them mercy? You have the chance to show them that they're wrong about you. Naruto-kun I *know* you have kindness inside you. I've seen how gentle you are with me and with Moka. No matter what people think I know you have a good heart. Can't you show it to them the way you have to me?"

"Why should I?" He said bitterly.

"Because if you do people might finally come to understand they were wrong about you."

He wanted to laugh in her face but held it in. "You really believe that? You really think anything I could do would change them and how

they see me? They **hate** me Hinata-chan, and I hate them. I don't care what they think of me."

"Then... then could you please do it for me?" She said in a small voice. Her pale lavender eyes stared at him beseeching and mournful. "Would you at least try for my sake? I want there to be peace in this village and for people to accept you. If you won't do it for them, would you do it for me?"

He looked into her kind face. He took a deep breath and sighed. "I won't make any promises Hinata-chan, but so long as they don't attack me I'll try and leave them be."

"Thank you Naruto-kun!" She said excitedly.

Moka had of course noted the fact that the real him had been alone with Hinata in her bedroom. She had asked him about it and he had told her what had happened.

"You and Hinata seem to have grown closer."

"Maybe a little," he admitted.

"I never would have expected you to make peace with the villagers."

"I haven't made peace with anyone," Naruto said. "At most this is just a cease fire. My long term goals are still the same."

"She is very close to her father, very loyal to him."

"I can't speak from experience, but that is normal right?"

"I wouldn't know Naruto-kun; I have never been close to my father." She paused for a bit. "Do you trust her?"

He closed his eyes and tried to relax. "The only person I trust completely is you Moka-chan."

High above the Hokage monument a single a single rocket raced into the night sky. It exploded in a shower of golden sparks.

Naruto opened his eyes again and actually smiled. "I love the fireworks. When I was a kid this was the only part of the festivals I got to enjoy. I would sit alone in my room by the window and watch the sky fill up with lights."

She smiled and leaned down to kiss him. "Then let's watch them together my love."

On top of the Hokage Tower a small crowd stood with their eyes cast to the night sky watching as the various rockets exploded and added to the magnificent display.

"Truly a glorious and wondrous night Hokage-sama," Danzo said.

Hiashi nodded slightly. Despite the celebration going on around him and down in the vast plaza below he seemed as stoic and solemn as ever. "It is indeed a fitting conclusion to our long war."

"The war isn't quite over yet," Jiraiya reminded. "There's still the little matter of Orochimaru."

"Orochimaru will be dealt with," Danzo said confidently. "The Sound village is rubble and he has only a handful of ninja left. With the whole army free now the war in the north is finished. It is only a matter of time until he is tracked down and exterminated."

"We've been trying to do that for four years now without much luck." Jiraiya said. "He's a Sannin; even without an army he's dangerous."

Danzo offered one of his very rare grins, a pale twist of his thin lips. "Then perhaps we should send our greatest weapons out to deal with him. Surely you, Sasuke, and Naruto would be more than a match for him."

Jiraiya eyed the one armed ninja warily. "Well that's true."

"Very well," the Hokage said. "You will go out to Rice country and destroy Orochimaru. You are not to return until that is accomplished."

Jiraiya turned to the Hokage with an unhappy look. "He is very good at hiding. It may take quite awhile to find him."

"With the war in Suna now complete finding Orochimaru and avenging Sarutobi is the priority. You may have whatever resources you require, but I want Orochimaru eliminated whatever the cost. To that end you and your team will hunt him down until he is dealt with."

"That could take quite awhile, months maybe even a year or more." Jiraiya stated.

"You have been away from the village for long periods before Jiraiya." The Hokage pointed out. "Do you not agree that this mission is vital?"

"No, unfortunately I have to say I can't think of anything else as important. Though if Naruto is kept in the field for so long that will be an open invitation to Akatsuki to come after him."

"I have complete faith not only in Naruto's ability and strength but in yours and Sasuke's as well. I trust that you will keep him safe from any threats."

And if I fail to I'm sure that would tear open your heart. Jiraiya thought. "Even if everything goes according to plan your son in law is likely to be away for a very long time."

"Perhaps that would be for the best," the Hokage freely admitted. "Perhaps after an extended mission he will have a greater appreciation for the village and its people."

Nearby a saddened Hinata listened in silence.

Following the fireworks Naruto and removed Moka's dress and they had made love on a blanket a top the roof. The two of them remained there wrapped together out in the cool summer night. At some point that night the two of them had noted a blaze coming from somewhere in the southern (poorer) section of the village.

"Some place is burning," Moka noted.

Naruto looked at the distant fire light and grimaced at the memories it brought to mind. "That happens sometimes on festival nights. All the free booze turns happy crowds into happy mobs." He shrugged and pulled Moka's naked body closer. "Just so long as they don't try and pay a visit here I don't really care."

They began making love again by the distant fire's glow.

"Father, please don't send Naruto-kun away like this." Hinata implored. She had waited until she could be alone with him before making her plea.

Hiashi frowned at her. "Tell me; are you any nearer to sharing his bed and producing an heir?"

Flushed with embarrassment she looked down. "No," she admitted timidly. She was a Jonin and had seen war, but even now she found it difficult to face her own father and his constant disapproval.

"Then my decision stands," Hiashi replied coolly. "This is in the best interest of the village. Hopefully when he returns some of his attitudes will have improved, perhaps he will even be willing to consummate your marriage."

She hated his icy tone; she understood that when he used it he was talking down to her. "But father..."

"My decision is made Hinata; I suggest you return to your home." Having been dismissed she could only stand there as her father

walked away from her.

In a hidden room somewhere beneath the village Danzo handed his protégé a folder. "You understand your mission?" Danzo asked. The question was a mere formality.

"Of course," Sai replied in his measured and unemotional voice. "I am to go to Orochimaru and claim to be a traitor. I will hand him the information regarding Naruto and aid in any way possible with Naruto's elimination."

Danzo nodded once. "And once Naruto is dead?"

"I am to execute Orochimaru."

"You understand that whatever happens you can never again return to Konoha? You shall have to play the part of the traitor to the end. If necessary once Naruto and Orochimaru are both dead you must allow either Jiraiya or Sasuke to kill you."

"I understand Danzo-sama," Sai said easily and without lament. "Such sacrifices are sometimes necessary to achieve the ultimate goal."

"I do regret that it is now necessary to sacrifice you, I had hoped Naruto would become the village's ultimate weapon. But he is too dangerous and too unpredictable. If a guard dog becomes rabid then he must be put down."

"I understand," Sai again spoke without any hint of fear or resentment.

From the shadows a third figure stepped forward. "If I have to I promise to make your death quick and clean."

Sai turned to the other person and gave him a weird smile. "I thank you for that Uchiha Sasuke."

A little revenge

Early the following morning one of the clones came to the roof top to wake them. They had a pair of unexpected visitors.

As Naruto descended the stairs to the grand hallway an old man and his young daughter looked up at him. Their faces looked worn and their eyes were red. They looked terrible.

"Teuchi-san, Ayame-chan, what's going on?"

As soon as he approached them they both bowed low. "Lord Namikaze," Ayame's voice sounded on the verge of tears. "Please forgive us for coming here and disturbing you, but we have no one else to turn."

"Lord Namikaze?" Naruto said in surprise. "Since when have you ever called me that? I'm just plain Naruto to the two of you, always. Now what's going on Ayame-chan?"

She and her father both stood there and looked at him sadly. Finally Teuchi was the one to answer.

"There was a fire..."

There weren't many people on the street that morning. There was never work the day after a festival. Most of the village would have been out all night drinking and celebrating. Employers knew better than to try and get anything done. The few people who were out and about that morning seemed to know better than to come any where near him. The moment they spotted him they turned right around and headed back the way they'd come. No one came within fifty yards.

That was probably for the best.

When Teuchi and Ayame had told him what had happened he'd needed to come and see with his own eyes. He was standing in the blackened wreckage of what had once been Ichiraku's. His favorite stool was still standing, though it was just blackened metal now. From in front of the charred counter he could now look and see right into the kitchen. The ovens and appliances were all half buried beneath charred wood and rubble. He tasted the air. Beneath the heavy smell of smoke was the familiar scent of gasoline as well as the scent of over a thousand different individuals.

Amazing, just when I think it would be impossible to hate them more than I already do . He looked all around. Despite the nearness of other buildings only this one had burned.

"If you only had one neck I'd hack it through." He wanted to slaughter them, *all* of them. But if he started laying waste to the village he would have to fight off a couple thousand ninja. After what had happened in Suna he understood he was not strong enough for that, not yet. *Oh but fuck me if I'm not getting a little revenge tonight.*

Without a sound he left the blackened ruins of what had been his only sanctuary as a small boy. Before heading home he made a side trip to Root headquarters. He had orders for Danzo.

"It wasn't just our business that was destroyed." Teuchi said wearily. "We lived in an apartment upstairs, we lost everything."

"And we have no insurance," Ayame was on the verge of tears.

"It is all right," Moka tried to sound comforting. "The two of you have been good friends to Naruto, he will not abandon you."

"That's right," Hinata agreed. "Naruto-kun... Naruto-kun can be very kind." Hinata grieved that these poor people had been burned out. But she was also scared of how Naruto might react. A blood bath would not help things.

"We are so ashamed that we came here to bother you, but really we had nowhere else to turn to for help." Ayame said.

"You needn't feel that way," Moka assured. "My husband often speaks of how much your kindness meant to him both then and now. You are very welcome here."

"The important thing is you're both all right." Hinata said.

"We were lucky," Teuchi said. "We were celebrating in another part of the village. If we had gone home early..."

"I'm sure nothing would have happened to you," Hinata spoke firmly. "The people of this village are not the sort who would hurt innocents."

"No, they are the sort who would just burn down their homes and businesses." Moka said sharply. "Open your eyes Hinata; they *are* lucky that they were not there."

Teuchi and Ayame looked uncomfortable while Hinata shook her head. "The villagers are..."

"Wolves dressed as sheep," Moka said. "They are sheep until there is no one stronger nearby, and then their claws come out."

"The villagers aren't like that." Hinata insisted.

"You might believe that," Moka said. "But then they never hated you."

Moka's words left everyone else feeling uncomfortable and the talk dies out until Naruto finally returned. When he came home he looked serious, but not too unhappy.

"Naruto-kun," Hinata asked nervously. "Did... did anything happen while you were out?"

Naruto glanced at her and understood perfectly what she was really saying. "Did I go crazy and start killing some of your precious

villagers?" He asked her pleasantly. "That's what you're really asking isn't it?" He shook his head. "If just one person had done it I would have dealt with him, but it was a whole damn mob."

He turned to Teuchi and Ayame and bowed very low to them, offering them a much more sincere apology than he ever had to Jiraiya of the Hokage. "Please forgive me Teuchi-san and Ayame-chan, but I am afraid I can't give you justice, at least not today. But I promise you that one day the people who committed this crime will pay for it."

Ayame gave him the first smile she'd felt since all this had begun. "That is all right Naruto-kun, we both trust in you."

He stood back up and took something from a pocket. "This is for you." He handed it to Ayame.

Taking it she saw that it was a check. "Two million ryu?!" She gasped. "Naruto-kun we can't it's too much!"

"You can and you will," Naruto told her. "Money doesn't matter to me. What matters to me is that you and your father were kind to me when almost no one else was. That money is yours, but I'm afraid it comes with one condition." He paused, hating what he was about to say. "I want you and your father to leave Konoha and to never return."

"But the village is our home! Why..."

"Because the next time the two of you might be not be somewhere else." Naruto said sadly. "The people here know that you're good friends to me, and I can't protect you. As long as you live here you'll be targets. Please, take the money and go somewhere safe."

"But..."

"He is right Ayame," her father said miserably. "After last night we will not be safe if we stay." He looked at Naruto. "I am very sorry

Naruto."

Naruto shook his head. "Don't be, the two of you find a nice place somewhere and start over. And if you should ever need me for any reason contact me and I will be there."

"This isn't fair!" Ayame began to cry. She reached out and hugged him. "You only came back a little while ago and now we have to abandon you!"

"You're not abandoning me," he told her gently. "I just want to keep the two of you safe."

It hurt him to have to say goodbye to two of the very few people he cared for, but he still did it.

That night he received a message from Danzo asking him to come to an address.

"Will you come with me Moka-chan? I need to make a trip tonight."

"I see," Moka nodded. She understood. Together they went to an old abandoned apartment building. Stepping inside they were greeted by a very unhappy Danzo.

"This was stupid," he said immediately. "I was forced to improvise; it will be very difficult to keep what was done secret. I may even need to sacrifice one of my agents."

"Not my problem," Naruto said coldly.

"If you would have waited for the proper opportunity..."

"I've waited eight years, half my life, that's long enough. Where is he?"

Danzo frowned powerlessly. "In room five fifteen. Please at least make sure not to leave any evidence behind."

Naruto climbed the stairs to the fifth floor and found room five fifteen. The door was unlocked. Inside the room was empty and bare. Except for a man lying unconscious in the middle of the floor tied up and gagged. He was dressed in an ANBU cloak with a mask of a ram lying next to him.

Smiling happily Naruto grabbed the mask with one hand while he lifted the man up with the other. He turned to his wife. "Shall we?"

"Of course dear." She took a hold of him and they were surrounded by black fire. In the next instant the room was empty.

"You really need to teach me how to do that."

Moka laughed.

The man slowly came awake. He wasn't sure what had happened. One moment he'd been on an ordinary patrol. The next...

"Fukashi," a friendly voice spoke. "I am so very happy to finally meet you. You have no idea just how much."

Fukashi saw his mask tossed at him. He looked up to see a man's face grinning down. The man had red eyes and fangs. Fukashi acted on instinct grabbing a kunai and leaping up him. His wrist was caught in a vice like grip and he was forced to let go of the kunai.

"Now there's no need for that," Naruto said teasingly and tossed him back to the ground as though he were nothing. "I'm not going to kill you; I'm not even going to hurt you."

Looking about Fukashi saw he was in a wood somewhere, but the trees all seemed to be withering, none of them had leaves. He knew the forests around the village and there were no trees like these anywhere nearby. He also noted that there was a full moon up in the

night sky. Before he had been abducted there had been a half moon out.

"How long have I been unconscious," Fukashi demanded as he slowly got to his feet.

"Only a few hours," a woman's voice called.

He saw a woman in a pale lavender dress standing a short ways off. She too had red eyes and fangs. He recognized her as the Lady Moka.

"That's a lie," he faced Naruto and considered his options. So long as Naruto did not attack him the safest course was to play along. He knew he was walking a very thin line and had to be careful if he wanted to survive. "The moon is full and I don't recognize these woods. I must have been unconscious for at least a week while you moved me."

Naruto laughed at him and Fukashi got a very bad feeling. "Oh we moved you all right, but not in the way you think." He waved an arm at their surroundings. "This is the world of Jabberwalks."

"Jabberwalks?"

"A very ancient race, long since died out. Their sacred world is dying too; the magics that sustain it are slowly fading away. Nothing else lives here, not a rabbit not a mouse. But there is water and you should find enough roots and vegetables to survive."

"What are you talking about? Sacred worlds? Magics?" Fukashi was staring to feel very cold.

Naruto eyed him and continued to smile. "The ANBU are the personal weapons of the Hokage. Even more so than other ninja you are expected to show absolute loyalty to the Hokage and his orders. That is true isn't it?"

"It is," he knew where this was leading. He carefully licked his lips.
"What happened that night, there was a reason I couldn't stop it."

"Oh? By that night I assume you're referring to my eighth birthday?
The night a mob broke into my apartment and lit me on fire while I
screamed and screamed? Is that the night you're referring to?"

"Ah, I..."

"You were the one assigned to protect me that night," Naruto said
pleasantly. "The Hokage had ordered you to protect me, but instead
you did nothing. You didn't even call for back up until after the fires
had gone out."

"You don't understand," he said timidly. "The crowd was huge; I
would have had to start killing innocent people who were out of
control."

"You could have just rescued me instead." The pleasant demeanor
fell away and Naruto spoke with a cool tone. "All you had to do was
grab me and get me out of there. But instead you ignored your
orders to protect me and let me burn. And the Hokage couldn't even
punish you as you deserved because the damn Council wouldn't
allow it. But today you'll be punished."

"Wha... what are you going to do to me?"

"Well burning you alive would seem fair now wouldn't it?" He held out
an open palm and filled it with fire. Fukashi took a couple steps back.
"But then it would be over much too quick. I want you to *suffer* ; I
want you to live right here trying to find some way to escape. I want
you to be alone, without a single living soul to talk to. And I want you
to live knowing that one day I will kill every living thing in Konoha...
including your wife and children. They're going to die in fire one day,
and you'll be partly to blame." With that he walked away back to his
wife.

"You wouldn't! You would never destroy your own village!"

He smiled back cruelly. "Why wouldn't I? They tried to do it to me."

"Please, my wife and children are innocent!"

Naruto stopped and look at him a moment. "I was innocent too once, that didn't save me."

He took Moka into his arms. They were surrounded by black fire and disappeared.

Fukashi screamed and howled.

But there was no one to hear him.

Preparations

Whenever the Hokage called him to the tower unexpectedly it always reminded him of his old middle school teachers asking him to stay after class. There was one difference though. He used to care what the teachers thought of him.

When he was ushered into the Hokage's office his godfather was there as well. That was anything but a surprise. But there was a third person he'd never seen before. A rather dour looking man with a pair of scars cutting across his face. The Hokage wasted no time making introductions.

"Naruto, this is Morino Ibiki head of the ANBU's torture and interrogation section."

Naruto sent the scowling section head his best cheesy grin. "Pleased to meet you! Maybe we can become best friends!"

Ibiki's facial expression didn't change by a hair. "This is not a social call. We're investigating the disappearance of an ANBU agent named Fukashi. We suspect he may have been abducted while on patrol yesterday. Would you happen to know anything about that?"

"Can't say that I do. His name was Fukashi? I've never even heard of him."

"He was the ANBU on duty when the, 'incident' occurred on the festival night eight years ago."

Naruto looked confused for a moment. "By, 'incident' do you mean when a whole army villagers broke in and tried to cook me?"

"That could be one description," Ibiki said darkly. "It would not be beyond the realm of possibility that you would seek revenge on him."

"You're right, I might have." Naruto shrugged dismissively. " *If* I'd known who he was. The old Hokage never told me, so how could I have known?"

"That's another very interesting question. If you don't mind I'd like you to come with me to ANBU headquarters to answer some questions." Ibiki reached out to put a hand on Naruto's shoulder.

"Touch me and I will rip your arm off," Naruto said pleasantly. Ibiki froze, his eyes held a momentary look of surprise. He and the other two focused on Naruto while remaining deathly silent. "I'm more than happy to answer any questions you like, but you can ask them here or in my home. I'm not going to ANBU headquarters so you can stick me in a cell and try to intimidate me by playing silly mind games."

"I can place you under arrest if you prefer." Ibiki said menacingly.

Naruto's smile widened. "Try it."

Ibiki, the Hokage, and Jiraiya were all eying Naruto as you might eye a vicious animal that was straining on a leash and just being held in check by it. He was not radiating any killer intent but his threat was obvious even so. Both the Hokage and Jiraiya were keeping a pair of hand signs in mind.

"No one is going to arrest you Naruto," the Hokage said calmly. "Ibiki only wishes to ask you a few questions, you are *not* a suspect. Could you please wait outside for a moment?"

"Sure," Naruto said cheerfully as he left the office.

Ibiki turned to the Hokage looking even more grim. "He is lying; he definitely has something to do with this."

"No doubt," Hiashi said. "Was there any evidence?" Hiashi already knew the answer.

"There's no evidence of anything," Ibiki said unhappily. "That's why it's vital he be brought in for an interrogation."

"If you try that he will tear ANBU headquarters down around you." Jiraiya said.

Hiashi let out a depressed sigh. "Ask him your questions Ibiki, but do it here in the tower."

Ibiki frowned, obviously unhappy with the decision. "Yes Hokage-sama." Bowing he too left the office.

As soon as they were alone Hiashi turned to Jiraiya. "I want Naruto out of the village by tomorrow morning."

"Yes Hokage-sama," Jiraiya had been hoping for at least a week's delay to get some other things in order, but with this development it probably was best to get Naruto out of Konoha. If the council or the general ninja population believed Naruto was killing fellow leaf nins...

"Naruto seems to absolutely delight in making things more difficult for me," Hiashi said. "He should realize that my patience is not limitless."

"I am sure with time the situation will improve." Jiraiya said. "He is still learning what it means to be a part of the village and to be a leaf nin."

Hiashi eyed Jiraiya carefully. "Well, perhaps you can try to instruct him on that. While you are out of the village try and explain to him that life can be pleasant as a clan head and council member. Most especially if he has an heir who is the Yondaime's grandson, that might make the village view him in a more positive light."

"Even if the heir comes from his first wife?" Jiraiya asked quietly.

"I believe the village would be more accepting were the child's mother one of their own."

"In other words, it would be for the best if Hinata were to give him a baby."

"Do you not agree Jiraiya? Would that not be for the best? Not only for Naruto but for the village as a whole."

"And for you," Jiraiya pointed out.

"Of course," Hiashi said simply. "I am the village."

Jiraiya frowned. *Minato never thought that way, neither did the old man.*

"So while you are away I expect you to do everything you can to bring Naruto around to this point of view. Also, with the war over I believe you can now ease up on his training."

"I don't understand, you want me to go easier on him?"

Hiashi nodded. "That's right, I think five tails is quite powerful enough. There is no need for more. You are **not** to help him gain any more of the Kyuubi's power."

Following a couple hours of playful questions and answers (at least on Naruto's part) Naruto was ready to head home. But before he could go Jiraiya caught him.

"Naruto, you me and Sasuke are going on an extended S-rank mission. Be prepared to leave by eight a.m. tomorrow morning."

"All right," Naruto said easily enough. "Can you tell me what the mission is?"

"We're going to track down and execute Orochimaru."

Far from being worried at such a difficult task Naruto seemed genuinely pleased. "Good, I can avenge the old man."

"That's right; I'd forgotten that you cared for the Third."

Naruto looked at him and slowly nodded. "He and Iruka-sensei were the only people to give a damn about me. So yeah, I want to avenge him. So how long do you think it will take? If I'm out of the village for a month or more Moka won't be happy."

Jiraiya carefully informed him that the mission might take up to a year or more.

"I see," Naruto said dully. "The Hokage really wants to get me killed doesn't he?"

"What? Of course not! Together you me and Sasuke will definitely be able to deal with Orochimaru and whatever ninja he still has left. The Hokage and I both believe we'll not only succeed but all return."

"I'm not worried about Orochimaru," Naruto said flatly.

"You're not? Are you afraid that we may be attacked by Akatsuki while we're in the field?"

"A little," Naruto admitted. "They're definitely more dangerous than Orochimaru, but they don't scare me either."

"Then just who are you scared of?"

A Half Hour Later at the Mansion

"Uh, Moka-chan?" Naruto spoke nervously.

"Yes Naruto-kun?"

"Uhm, I've just found out I'm leaving on a mission tomorrow with godfather and our pal Sasuke."

Moka frowned. "You only just returned and they're sending you away again?"

Naruto nodded. "I'm afraid so, that's the life of a ninja."

"How long can I expect you to be away this time?"

He swallowed and hesitated. "Uhm, a uhm, year or so."

Moka froze for a second and stared at him. "Did you say a year?"

"Yahoo!!" A girl's voice cried out. Kokoa burst through the closed door and raced up to Moka to embrace her. "That's great! I get to spend a whole year with my beautiful and powerful sister without... ack... k... ke..." Kokoa's words halted and Moka literally began choking her with a single hand. Kokoa struggled to get loose without much effect.

"How many times have I told you not to spy on me?" With that she delivered a punch that sent her younger sister through a wall. Having disposed of Kokoa's interference she turned back to a very nervous looking Naruto. "As for you Naruto-kun you will have to take me shopping."

"Shopping?" That wasn't the reaction he'd been expecting. "Ah, sure Moka-chan, I'll be happy to go shopping with you. What are you wanting to get?"

"Camping equipment I suppose, and whatever else I may need for such a long journey."

"A journey? Moka-chan are you planning on going somewhere while I'm away?"

She gave him a look that seemed to say, 'you're an idiot.' "I will be accompanying you on your mission Naruto-kun. I am not going to be separated from you for an entire year."

"You want to come with us? But..."

Moka leaned in menacingly. "Are you *wanting* to be away from me Naruto-kun?"

"No! Of course not! I always want you with me Moka-chan!"

"Good, then let's begin. We have much to do if we're going to be ready by tomorrow morning."

They spent most of the afternoon acquiring supplies and making arrangements. When the two of them returned to the mansion Moka found her little sister and dragged her to the dojo for a 'chat.'

"It's time for you to go home Kokoa," Moka told her bluntly.

"What? But why neesan? We were just starting to have fun together!"

"I will be traveling with Naruto and the rest of his unit and do not want you following after constantly ambushing me and asking for duels. I also don't want you staying here unsupervised. I can only imagine the trouble you will cause once you become bored. Things are difficult enough without you adding fuel to the fire."

"You make it sound like you don't trust me!" Kokoa said sullenly.

"And who was it who kept tracking me down and torturing me all through middle school?"

"But that was different! You were trapped inside yourself. Now my beautiful and powerful sister is free again and I can finally surpass you."

"I will not have time for you while Naruto and I traveling."

Kokoa crossed her arms and took on a muley expression. "I am not leaving! Absolutely no way!"

Moka sighed. She'd known it would come to this. Hoping Kokoa would see reason was always a pointless exercise. "Very well, why don't settle this with a duel. If you defeat me I'll stay here and we can spend all the time together you want while Naruto is away. If I win you agree to go home and not tell anyone about what is happening with me. And you can't return for at least a year." As she'd known would happen Kokoa had a huge smile on her face. No matter how often or how brutally she lost she was *always* eager for another round.

"You're on neesan!" She grabbed her pet bat and transformed him into a massive double edged battle axe. "But I'm warning you that I won't take it easy on you!" With a shout she charged in with a wild look in her eyes.

Fifteen Seconds Later

Moka was climbing the steps out of the dojo. She looked back over her shoulder at a prostrate Kokoa lying in a crater. *I'll need to order repairs made before I go and I better remind her about keeping things secret when she goes home.*

Hinata smiled sadly as Naruto closed the door to her bedroom. After never being alone with the, 'real' him here this was the second time in just a few days. And this time he'd been the one to ask to talk with her. Normally she'd have been excited, but she couldn't bring herself to feel very good about things.

"I think I know what you want to talk about Naruto-kun."

"Your dad told you about the mission? Well, I'm a little surprised he would talk to you about and S-rank so casually."

"He discussed it openly with Jiraiya while he was watching the fireworks."

"Is the Hokage usually so lax talking about S-rank missions? I would have expected security to be just a little bit tighter."

"I think he did it on purpose Naruto-kun," she explained. "I think he wanted the Council and the clan heads to know he was sending out his most elite team to deal with Orochimaru."

Naruto smiled. "And he probably wanted them to know I'd be away for awhile."

Hinata looked worried. "Naruto-kun that's not..."

"Hinata-chan," he said gently. "I'm not stupid. I may act dumb sometimes but I'm really not. Of course Hiashi wants me out of the village, and if I can kill Orochimaru while I'm away so much the better."

Hinata looked down at her feet. "I'm sorry Naruto-kun; I never wanted you to have to be away so long." She felt his hand tenderly lift her chin so she was looking at his face again. He was still smiling at her and his dark blue eyes were kind.

"I don't blame you for what your father does." He leaned in and touched his lips to hers, giving her a gentle kiss.

She shut her eyes and leaned into his kiss. He knew exactly how she liked being kissed and felt warmth fill her. It felt like it did when his clones kissed her. "Naruto-kun," she said breathlessly.

"Once I leave Hinata-chan I won't be able to leave any clones with you. You'll be in charge of the mansion and everything else while I'm away."

"But Moka will..."

"Moka's coming with me Hinata-chan."

"What? But she can't, she'd not even a leaf nin. There's no way she can be part of a mission, never mind an S-rank."

"She's coming or I'm not going," he said simply.

"I see," she knew her father would permit it if those were Naruto's terms. "Then why don't I come too?"

"Do you think your father would allow that? Besides I don't want you in danger. I might not be able to protect you and I don't want to see you hurt Hinata-chan."

"I'm a Jonin Naruto-kun. I can take care of myself."

He shook his head. "You're not coming Hinata-chan."

"So instead you're going to leave me all alone?"

"Hinata-chan you're from here. You have your whole clan living next door and you have friends too. Moka really only has me."

"But... but I'll miss you! I don't want you away from me for that long!" She pressed herself against him and held on tight. "I love you!"

He put his own arms around her. He knew what she wanted to hear, but couldn't say it. "I'll miss you too. So let's have dinner together just you and me."

She looked at him with longing. Sometimes he seemed so close to her, but she still couldn't reach his heart. *You'll love me someday Naruto-kun, as you love Moka, and as I love you.* She nodded her head and tried to seem happy. "I'd really like that."

That night as he headed to bed Moka greeted him wearing a tiny black teddy.

"How was dinner with Hinata?" She asked as he began to undress.

"It was fine," he said simply. "It turns out she knew her father was going to send me away but didn't say a word."

"No doubt her father asked her not to," Moka said. "You can't trust her. Even if she really does love you her first loyalty is to her father."

He shed his clothes and slid onto the bed beside her. "I know."

She kissed him passionately and pressed her body against his. "She will betray you one day," Moka whispered as their lips parted.

"I know," he said sadly. "Let's not talk about this anymore tonight." He pulled up the lace teddy and tried to forget everything else as they slowly began to make love.

The other two

The alarm clock rang and he groggily reached out to turn it off. But rather than the annoying clock his hand landed somewhere else, somewhere round and very soft.

"Ooooooh, Arashi you naughty boy!" His wife began to giggle.

Opening one eye he saw here exactly his hand was. Smiling he gave a gentle squeeze that brought another, 'ooh' out of her. "Morning Kurumu-chan."

Laughing she reached over and turned the alarm clock off. She then rolled over and pressed her breasts down into his face. "Yahoo, good morning my naughty little boy!" Even after being together over a year now this was still her preferred method of greeting. He'd lost track of how many hundreds of times he'd come close to suffocating.

When she finally eased up on him he smiled up at her. "Come on Kurumu-chan, we have to get to class."

More than a year had passed since they had left Youkai Academy. They were husband and wife now and living in a luxurious home on the outskirts of Tokyo. Ageha had given it to them as a wedding gift. He was no longer Uzumaki Naruto, that was a dangerous name; he was now Kurono Arashi, a seventeen year old student attending Saito High School. He even looked different as his hair was now kept longer and dyed a light brown. He also no longer had scars on his cheeks. Those had slowly faded over a few months. When he looked in the mirror some times he didn't always recognize the person staring back at him.

As they rode the crowded train into Tokyo Kurumu pressed herself tightly against him. She was in her cute school uniform with a white blouse, dark blue long skirt, and bright red scarf. His version of the

same uniform was a white shirt with a dark blue blazer with black pants and a red tie. As they rode along towards their stop Kurumu was content to just hang on to him and rest her head on his shoulder. She was still every bit as in love with her, 'destined one' as she had been on the day they had Youkai together. Shutting his eyes he recalled that day. He remembered being on the bus beside Kurumu and looking out to see his original self standing besides Moka. He could still remember that last glimpse of her pink hair and sad smile before they had pulled away.

He knew he would never see or hear from Moka again.

Opening his eyes he looked at the beautiful girl leaning against him. He loved Kurumu, he truly did. She was wild and fun whether they were sneaking into a club or just watching one of her chick flicks at home. Being with Kurumu he was always laughing and wondering what she would say or do next to catch him off guard. She had even agreed to take cooking lessons. Her results so far had been... interesting, but slowly getting better. And their nights together were... bliss. He did love her, he truly did. But he knew that there would always be a corner of his heart that would belong to Moka.

As the two of them walked into school arm in arm they drew looks from all the other students, boys and girls. Kurumu was easily the most beautiful and, ah, well developed girl in school. When class had first begun she had drawn a lot of attention from the boys and had several confessions within her first week. At first she'd really enjoyed all the male attention, until he'd explained to her just how much it bothered him. After that she had made it a point not to do anything to encourage any of the boys and to make it clear she was taken.

Of course a few of the older boys thought they could change that by running him off. Unfortunately for them, even if he could no longer use chakra he remained a black belt and an expert with kunai. And of course none of them were ninja or monsters. After sending several of the stubborn idiots to the hospital they finally got the message. Oddly enough having won a bunch of fights and gotten

suspended four times had made him a bit of a heart throb. Kurumu had then been the one to swiftly lay down the law.

Everyone at school now knew they were a couple. The fact that they always arrived together and missed the same days was noted. No one knew about their marriage, that was a carefully guarded secret. But there was a rumor that they were living alone together somewhere. They were both very popular and had many friends, but none of them close friends. Certainly none of them had ever been invited to their home.

School itself was a social activity for Kurumu who was still somehow blithely getting by with D's and a few C's. She wasn't worried about attending university. She was planning to start her career after high school and enter the honored family profession of seducing and ruining men. **That** had caused some arguments. Kurumu insisted that since she was a succubus it was what she was literally born to do.

Since he was no longer a ninja Arashi had put aside his old prankster persona and actually become a serious student. He was getting straight A's and was number three in the school rankings. Once he put his mind to it school was actually pretty easy. He was no longer a ninja but still had the desire to face danger and be involved in combat. So he was planning to join the JDF, the Japanese Defense Forces. He was aiming for the Army Military Academy so he could become an officer. The Japanese military was relatively small and so there were only 200 positions available each year, competition on the entrance exams was fierce. But he liked the challenge and the idea of *earning* the respect of others and leading men into battle. Kurumu didn't like the thought of him in danger but was willing to support it if it made him happy.

At lunch they were surrounded by friends and Kurumu was queen over her court. Arashi relaxed and enjoyed himself. Being in Tokyo was a little dangerous for him as there were people here who knew him as Naruto the idiot prankster, not as Arashi the tough scholar.

But Tokyo was a really big city, and the slight danger of being found out made things more interesting.

As they walked home from the train station Kurumu turned to him. "Arashi-kun, you know our anniversary is next month."

He turned to her and nodded. "I know."

She looked a little nervous. "Could we do something special to celebrate it?"

"Anything you like Kurumu-chan."

"Really?"

"Of course! It's our very first anniversary; I'll do whatever you like if it makes you happy."

"Good!" She suddenly stopped and reached into her book bag. She pulled out a leather bound text that he was sure was not a school book. She handed it to him. "Pages 142, 202, 313, and 322."

He took the book from her. It was the Karma Sutra. He opened it up to page 142, there was an ancient drawing there detailing something they called the, 'Lotus Blossom.' He stared at the bizarre image. *How the hell can the guy be smiling like that when he looks like a pretzel?* Sighing he shut the book and gave his wife an amused look. "You're not very easy to please."

"Yahoo! I like being a challenge."

Laughing he leaned over and kissed her. At the very least life with her would never be boring.

A baby's cry pierced the night's quiet. Sirayuki Nanashi opened his eyes, glancing at the clock he saw it was just after four in the

morning.

"It's your turn," Mizore mumbled.

With a yawn he stumbled out of bed and over to the crib. He gently lifted his squalling newborn son. He slowly rocked him back and forth in his arms. "There there, little Iruka."

Refusing to be mollified the little boy kept crying. Slowly and he continued to rock his son back and forth and whisper to him the child settled down. After about fifteen minutes he carefully put the child back down, at last peacefully asleep. He then got back into bed beside his wife. He closed his eyes and was soon asleep himself.

Almost the instant they had returned to her home Mizore had talked about having children. Her race was slowly dying out and so it was considered a duty for each snow girl to have as many children as possible. But Mizore had also wanted to have his babies out of simple love for him. Despite her youth Mizore loved being a mother and Tsurara and the entire community were very happy about it. Unlike human society there was no stigma attached to having children among snow people. He and Mizore were viewed as adults and treated as such by Tsurara and everyone else.

The three of them lived in the house where Mizore had grown up along with her mother. Nanashi was still trying to get used to living with Tsurara. In most ways she was a very kind and gentle soul. She treated him like he was her son and Nanashi enjoyed those occasional moments with his new, 'mom' when she was giving him motherly advice or offering to help with something. The problem was the fact she kept sneaking up on him in all sorts of uncomfortable situations. She also still had the habit of creating very sharp ice constructs whenever he said something to upset her. Since he no longer had healing or the ability to create fire he'd learned to be very careful with what he said around her.

As was the usual routine they got up early in the morning. Mizore breast fed their son while he showered and dressed. Once Mizore had also showered and dressed they headed downstairs to where Tsurara had a nice breakfast prepared.

As he ate he kept looking over to where his son was once more asleep. It was amazing to be a father, to think that he actually had someone who would not only love him but *depend* on him. That thought was a whole lot more scary than any monster could ever hope to be. Having been an orphan he had always dreamed of having a family. Now he had a wife a son and even a mom. And he was even living in a village where people accepted him with open arms.

It was heaven.

He wondered if all the people who had families and who were a part of their community really understood how lucky they were.

As he finished up breakfast Iruka woke up and started crying again. Mizore got up from the table and took him. Ashe smiled down at her little son's face and spoke to him in her soft caressing tones. Nanashi sat there and just watched, happy just to know that this was his family.

"You're going to be late for work," Tsurara reminded him as she took his empty plate."

"Right, thanks mom." He went over to his wife and gave her a gentle kiss. "Bye honey." He reached down and affectionately touched his son's cheek, careful not to disturb him.

"Have a good day at work Nanashi-kun," Mizore told him.

Since they were both now viewed as adults and living in the secret sacred world of the snow people neither of them were in school any more. As Nanashi checked his equipment and started skiing out of

the village he thought how lucky he was. He not only had a loving family, a peaceful home, and acceptance he even had a really good job. There were times when he really missed being a ninja. Missed that sense of power and the ability to do so many amazing things. He also missed Moka. He was honest enough with himself to admit that no matter how much he loved Mizore he would always cherish his memories of his first real love.

But he was happy, and so was Mizore. He intended to have a long and happy life with his loving family around him.

On the slopes beneath the village he spotted some tracks that were heading eastward. He headed in that direction keeping a careful eye out. Even though he lacked the abilities of the snow people his many other talents had made him perfect for his job as a, 'ranger.' He and a handful of others patrolled the area around the village. The harsh mountain environment was home to other beings beside snow people, some of them quite dangerous.

Sensing the vibrations coming from beneath him he veered off just as the huge eight foot tall monster leapt up out of the snow. The creature was covered in shaggy white fur. It had coal black eyes and a huge jaw filled with pointed yellow teeth.

"Raaawwwr!!" The monster cried out as it began to charge for him. This was a Yeti, and unlike other monsters it had no intelligence, it was a huge dangerous animal pure and simple.

Smiling Naruto whipped out the specialized rifle Tsurara had given him. It fired special high impact explosive snow balls; it was lethal *and* environmentally friendly. He brought the rifle to his shoulder and aimed dead center at the target.

"Kami I love my work!" He squeezed the trigger and opened fire.

A lie is the truth

Eleven Months Ago

They were at the gate waiting on Naruto. In his ninja career Jiraiya had many years away on extended missions. The idea of leaving Konoha for a year or so didn't bother him at all. Especially not if he would finally get to deal with that bastard he'd once called friend and teammate. Looking over at his apprentice he noted Sasuke to be as relaxed as he was. Since being told he'd be going on an extended mission with Naruto Sasuke had not uttered a single word of protest.

"You know Sasuke I'm proud of you." Jiraiya said. "Even though we've been on plenty of missions you've never been away from the village more than a couple of months. To be honest I was half expecting you to go to the Hokage and demand you not be a part of this."

Sasuke's lips twitched into that smug little grin he always wore when he thought he knew something you didn't. "What, and miss the chance to kill Orochimaru? If I do that I'll be a ninja legend and the Uchiha name will become even more glorious. Of course I'm coming."

That was true. Jiraiya damn well knew just how much his student cared about his reputation. But he suspected there was something more to it. "I'm also glad you don't have a problem being with Naruto for so long."

"I can put up with him if it means I can achieve my goals."

Jiraiya nodded, that was an adult answer. Maybe the three of them would be able to manage together after all. As eight o'clock neared they finally spotted Naruto approaching in his normal black outfit and back pack. Jiraiya smiled widely when he saw that the lovely Moka had come to see him off. He was especially happy given that she

was dressed in a fiery red dress that didn't even come halfway down her thighs. It also revealed quite a lot of her ample cleavage. He didn't realize he'd started drooling until he felt some killer intent coming from Naruto.

"Don't look at her that way you damn pervert." Naruto growled at him.

Moka seemed amused. "That's all right Naruto-kun I don't mind." She sent a very cold look in Sasuke's direction. "So long as he only looks."

"We have to get going," Sasuke said to no one in particular.

"Then let's go, I do not mean to delay you or slow you down." As she spoke she turned slightly to reveal she had a much smaller back pack on.

"Just what the hell do you think you're playing at?" Sasuke demanded. "This isn't a weekend trip; it's an S-rank mission. It'll be dangerous and no one's going to have time to watch out for you."

Grinning she suddenly reared back and brought her fist down into the ground catching everyone, even Naruto, by surprise. As the earth shook they were all forced to leap back. When the dust cleared there was a ten foot deep crater in the middle of the road.

"I don't need anyone to protect me. I can take care of myself." She spoke while looking directly at Sasuke. "You should know that by now."

Sasuke grunted and his hands seemed to twitch a bit.

I don't believe it! Jiraiya thought. *She's almost as scary as Tsunade, just with much smaller boobs.* "That is very impressive," Jiraiya admitted. "But I'm afraid only Leaf ninja are permitted to go on missions for the Hokage. That is even more true when it comes to an S-rank mission. I'm sorry but you can't come with us."

She tilted her head a bit and grinned. "And how do you plan to stop me?"

Jiraiya glanced back at the crater and hesitated. The one and only time he had come near death had been when Tsunade had caught him peeping on her. He didn't relish the thought of trying to force Moka into anything.

Meanwhile Sasuke turned a furious glare not towards Moka but to Naruto. "Why don't you just order her to stay here?!"

Naruto smiled back at him. "Because I'm not quite ready to die yet."

Moka spared Sasuke a glance. "I am Naruto's wife, **not** his servant. Don't believe for even a second that I am anything like that idiot Ino or some of the other simpering fan girls that seem to infest this place. Unlike any of them I can think for myself. I am accompanying you and that is final."

Jiraiya sighed. "All of you just wait here; I'll go and speak to the Hokage."

"Be sure to tell him that I'm not leaving without her," Naruto added quietly.

"You can't refuse an S-rank mission Naruto," Sasuke said sharply.

"Want to bet?"

Jiraiya sighed again. *If I tell Hiashi Naruto is giving him an ultimatum things will go very badly.* "You know what? On second thought what the hell? I never could say no to a beautiful woman. Let's go."

"You can't do that!" Sasuke protested. But he was talking to himself. Grunting angrily he leapt to catch up to them.

Present Day

As the three of them arrived at the gate there was actually a small crowd gathered. Some of them had started to cheer when they spotted Jiraiya, but the cheers quickly faded when the other two arrived just behind him.

"We're finally home again," Jiraiya sounded relived and happy.

"Hurray," Naruto said dully. He looked over at Moka. She was in a slightly more modest black dress this time. She seemed a little worried. He knew that concern was for him. After what had happened she hadn't wanted to return. He held out his hand to her. "Let's go home Moka-chan."

Nodding she took his hand. Her eyes scanned the faces of the nearby crowd. "Yes, that sounds good."

"That'll have to wait Naruto, Moka; the Hokage will expect us to report in and tell him about what happened. Especially about..."

"Where's Sasuke?!" A shrill voice cried out. From within the mass a single blonde girl came through pushing aside anyone who got in the way. Ino was dressed in her usual purple outfit and was heading straight towards Naruto with fire in her eyes. "Why isn't Sasuke-kun with you? Where is my darling fiancé?"

"Ino, we can't discuss..." Jiraiya started to answer but Naruto cut him off.

"He's gone to join the rest of his clan," Naruto replied without an ounce of sympathy.

Ino froze like a deer caught in a sudden bright light. A collective gasp ran through the crowd. Almost instantly the mood changed and darkened. There were mutters and hard looks. Some of them took a step forward while others began picking up things to throw.

"Try it!" Naruto screamed at them and sent out a wave of killer intent so strong some of the crowd began to vomit. The rest froze, too

terrified to even move. "Oh just fucking try it! Give me a fucking reason!" Those in the crowd who could still move shuffled back away from him with their eyes cast down. Those too scared to even do that dropped to their knees and shut their eyes in fear.

"Naruto! That's enough!" Jiraiya told him. "You aren't helping things!"

Naruto sent his godfather a hard look. "Fine," he muttered and stopped sending out his killer intent. Freed from its numbing affects the crowd quickly dispersed and vanished.

"You do realize that they're going to be spreading stories about you now?" Jiraiya said.

"Yeah, what else is new?"

"You killed him," Ino whispered. Her own voice seemed to snap her out of it. "You killed Sasuke didn't you?!" Driven by pure fury she ran at Naruto determined to kill him.

Naruto was surprised by the volume of Ino's killer intent, but certainly wasn't bothered by it. Her attack was obvious and embarrassingly straight forward. There was no need to draw on his red chakra or to transform into a more powerful form. The fist she was aiming at his jaw he caught with his left hand. With his right he punched her with all his might right in her belly. He didn't hold back a thing.

Ino felt the air rush out of her and pain go right through. It was like being hit with a sledgehammer. She crumbled to the ground and curled up at Naruto's feet. Except for her gasps for air she couldn't make a sound.

He looked down at her contemptuously. "Weak ninja like you shouldn't try frontal attacks. Since you're grieving I'll give you one pass, but just one. Come at me again for any reason and I'll kill you." With that he took hold of Moka's hand again and they walked away.

As they walked through the village Moka leaned close so she could whisper to him. "They're all going to blame you for Sasuke."

"I know," he whispered back.

"They're all going to come after you now."

"Maybe not," he told her. "I have an idea that should help defuse some of that righteous fury of theirs. If it works it should satisfy the ninja of the village, what the villagers think doesn't matter."

"If it doesn't work what then?" Moka whispered. "Are you strong enough to fight them all?"

He shook his head a bit. "I've gotten stronger, but I'm still not that strong yet."

"Then what will we do?"

He gave her a quick kiss to try and reassure her. "Run."

Eleven Months Ago

Tayuya was looking at him nervously. He didn't usually come into her bedroom and ask to talk to her. Since she'd been asleep all she had on was a T shirt and some panties.

"I'm sorry to hear you'll have to away so long but I'm fucking relieved that I don't have to come with you." Tayuya told him.

"The Hokage would never allow that, he'd think you were going to betray us to your old master." Naruto grinned at her. "Of course I'm sure that would *never* cross your mind now would it?"

"Are you fucking crazy? If Orochimaru ever gets his hands on me I'm dead! He doesn't accept desertion for any reason, not even if there's no other choice but death. Anyway I wouldn't be much of a help, everything I know about him and his operations..."

"You've already told me, I know." He nodded and seemed content. "I don't need you to help me with Orochimaru; I have something else in mind for you."

"Wh... what?"

He smiled at her. "You're going to betray me."

"No!" She leapt back and put her back to a wall as looked at him pleading. "No! I swear I would never do that!"

Still smiling he stepped forward and took a hold of her. "Yes you will," he told her calmly. "You're going to betray me Tayuya."

Present Day

The moment they returned to the estates Naruto created two hundred clones and set up a perimeter and search to make sure there were no unexpected surprises. One of the clones found Hinata and gave her a greeting filled with kisses and tender words. Hinata would be kept busy and under the watchful eye of that clone for the next few hours.

Another clone found Tayuya and quickly escorted her to the master bedroom where Naruto and Moka were waiting.

She quickly bowed to them in her maid's outfit. "Welcome home."

"Did you miss us?" Naruto sounded amused.

"Uh, yes?"

He chuckled a bit. "Well did anything interesting happen while we were away?"

"Not really," Tayuya said. "Things were actually very calm. No major problems or incidents. Hinata spent a lot of time at work or training

and she spent a lot of time staying at the Hyuuga mansion instead of here."

"How nice that she is close to her family," Moka said quietly.

"Did any strangers visit the mansion?" Naruto asked.

Tayuya nodded. "She invited friends and family over for tea or dinner some times; no one ever stayed more than a few hours. Her father visited her the most, about twenty times in all."

"Really? And my father in law never visited once while I was here. You know it almost makes me think he doesn't like me." He looked at her intently. "Now what about the other thing we discussed. Did you betray me?"

She nodded immediately. "I betrayed you many times," she reached into her apron and produced a list. "You weren't gone a week before I was approached on one of my shopping trips. And you wouldn't believe how well they pay; I've got a shoe box stuffed with thousand and ten thousand ryu notes."

"I'm happy for you," he took the rather long list and looked it over carefully. "Consider that your bonus, and no yearly raise."

Moka looked over his shoulder and saw what was written there. She frowned; it was a very long list with over twenty names. "It looks like every clan in Konoha is spying on you."

"Not every clan," he said softly. "Hyuuga isn't listed."

"Of course not," Moka said. "They already have a spy in place."

Naruto ignored that and saw what other names were and were not on the list. "Ibiki is on here, but not Danzo. Danzo probably figured it would be a waste of Root's money. I also see foreign villages listed here."

Tayuya nodded. "Iwa, Kiri, and Kumo; the three other big villages. I was contacted by local agents. All three of them promised me a huge pay out and their protection if I would perform an important mission for them."

"They want you to assassinate me."

Tayuya nodded.

"What exactly did you tell them?"

"I told them I wasn't suicidal and just spying on you was dangerous enough."

He nodded, that would certainly be believed. He hadn't really thought much about the other villages. But it would make sense that they would want to keep an eye on Konoha's most powerful weapon. They weren't the only foreign enemy listed. "You have here, 'criminal organization' just who are they?"

"I don't know," Tayuya replied. "All I know is they paid really well and are really anxious to know anything they could about your movements."

"They're Akatsuki," Naruto said with absolute certainty. "They're the only criminals who would be interested in me." He began to rub his chin thoughtfully. "This could be useful, though of course I could only use it once." He focused on her again. "And what have you been telling them?"

Eleven Months Ago

"Relax Tayuya; I *want* you to betray me."

She stared at him. "Why would you want that?"

He laughed. "So that you can feed my enemies whatever I *want* them to know. There won't be any clones here once I leave. That means your movements in the village will increase as you'll have to do more jobs like shopping and such."

"More work?" She sounded depressed.

He shook his head. "Don't worry; I'm sure you'll be compensated. Whoever approaches you I want you to pretend to resist, be afraid, but let them talk you into it. While I'm away you won't have any new intelligence to sell them but they should pay well just to know my habits and state of mind."

"State of mind?"

He nodded. "I want you to tell everyone that I'm constantly depressed and fearful. Tell them I drink and I spend a lot of my time crying on Moka's shoulder. Say I'm always complaining about being misunderstood, and that all I want is for the people to love me."

"You're kidding right?" Tayuya gawked. "Who's going to believe that?"

"You'd be surprised; people are rarely what they seem. If you paint a picture much different from what seems to be the truth suspicious minds will believe it. *Especiallly* if the information comes to them through clandestine channels like a spy hidden within the target's home. Tell them that when no one can see me I'm weak and filled with doubt and they'll think that the truth and my public image the lie."

Tayuya slowly nodded. "I understand, I'll do as you say."

"I also want you to keep an eye on Hinata, don't make it too blatant but keep track of her as much as you can."

"Yes."

He smiled. "And of course you're only *pretending* to betray me. If you share any of my secrets, or tell anything I don't want you to tell I'll cook you."

She gulped. "I... I understand, I'll tell them just what you want and nothing else."

"Good," before her eyes he transformed. His eyes became red and his scars disappeared. He gave her a hungry look.

"Aw hell," she knew what was coming.

"Now since I'm leaving how about a quick meal?" He bit down on her neck.

"Ow, ow ow," she cried out. *I won't miss this!*

Present Day

Naruto nodded satisfied. "You've done well Tayuya."

She let out a relieved breath. "Thank you Naruto-san."

Naruto looked at his wife. "You hungry?"

Smiling she nodded. "Simply famished."

As Tayuya watched Naruto transformed into his vampiric form. "Then let's have a bite to eat."

"Aw hell."

Chomp. Chomp.

"Ow, ow, ow!" *I hate my job!*

Nara Shikaku looked at his guest warily. He gave him a slight bow just to be polite. Even if he did not want the man in his home he needed to be polite. The last thing he wanted was to offend him. "Welcome to my home Namikaze Naruto. I'd heard you and your team were returning today."

Naruto frowned. "I guess security isn't what it should be. The Hokage should really look into that. In any case I'm just a clone. I've come here requesting your attendance at an emergency session of the Council."

Shikaku lifted a single eyebrow. "An emergency session? Why is the Hokage calling one and why did he send you instead of an ANBU?"

"It's not being called by the Hokage; it's being called by me, as is my right as both a clan head and council member. I'm calling for an emergency meeting at the Namikaze mansion in half an hour."

"And what could be so important that you would call the Council into session?"

Naruto's clone smiled. "Treason."

The truth is a lie

Eleven Months Ago

It was the first night out of the village and they had just set up camp. Both Jiraiya and Sasuke noticed that the happy couple were sharing a single tent and had only brought one sleeping bag.

"They're setting up a ways from ours," Sasuke mentioned.

Jiraiya began an obscene little giggle. "They probably want to spare us all the gaps and moans. I wonder if Moka is a yeller." He whipped out a notebook and began scribbling like mad. "This will be a great chapter."

Sasuke looked at him with unhidden distaste. "Do you ever think about anything else you pervert?"

"Sure, booze and money," seeing Sasuke's reaction Jiraiya laughed a bit and put the notebook away. (He would work on it more later.) "Just kidding, I do sometimes think about my mission."

"Then tell me something," Sasuke asked. "How are we going to find our target when no one's had any luck for over four years?"

"Well it won't be easy of course, form everything I've learned my old teammate has become obsessed with security and keeping hidden. If my sources are to be believed the only time he comes out of hiding is when he's moving to a new base. He's just about impossible to track so we won't try."

"What do you mean? If we're not going to even try and track him what are we doing out here?"

Jiraiya looked over and grinned. "I said we wouldn't try and track *Orochimaru*. Instead we'll be on the trail of his right hand, Kabuto.

He does still go out on missions, him we might eventually track down. Though it may take time."

Sasuke nodded and looked over to where Naruto and Moka were talking. Her presence would make things more difficult. Thinking about it he wondered if there might be an opportunity to get rid of her some where along the line.

Three Months Ago

They were in River country. They had left Rice country behind weeks ago once they confirmed that Orochimaru had already abandoned it. He seemed to have hidden bases everywhere. They were following a long series of rumors about Kabuto.

It was night time and as usual Naruto had twenty clones patrolling the area while they slept. Sharing their large warm sleeping bag Moka leaned close to him to whisper. Even after all the time spent together the two of them were still cautious around the others. Unlike the girls they had befriended at the academy they did not trust either Jiraiya or Sarutobi.

"What happened today? Sasuke was staring daggers at you all afternoon. He usually hides his feelings better."

Naruto smirked and gave her a lick on her neck that made her shiver a little. "Oh that? He's just pissed because godfather offered to let me sign the toad summoning contract. Apparently he's been wanting to do that for a long time but godfather wouldn't let him. So he got kind of angry when I got asked." He began to laugh. "Oh but he got even madder when I turned godfather down, and you should have seen the look on godfather's face. It was hilarious."

"Why did you turn him down?"

"Because I would have had to sign a *contract* . And I don't know what would have been required of me, I wouldn't put it past that old

bastard to try and trick me into something. I don't like giving other people any sort of power over me. Besides I can summon foxes and youkai kitsunes, that's a lot better than summoning a bunch of dumb toads."

Two Weeks Ago

"Aaaaaah!!!" The man screamed as the smell of cooking meat filled the summer air.

"Did that hurt?" Naruto teased as he pulled his finger back from the man's shoulder. The skin where he'd touched him was a bright pink and there was a whiff of smoke still coming off of it. At the tip of Naruto's finger a slight orange flame danced about. "We can stop right now if you want, just tell me what I need to know."

The man looked at him with tears in his eyes. "I swear I don't know anything!"

"I see," Naruto said pleasantly. He pressed his finger into the middle of the man's chest. He left it there as he counted off five seconds and pulled it back again. He then politely waited for the man to stop screaming. "We can continue this as long as you like, I don't mind." His smile was wide and it was a genuine happy smile. "No, I don't mind a bit." He pressed his finger into the man's chest again.

Nearby the three of them listened as the man screamed again and began begging for mercy.

"He really is sick isn't he?" Sasuke said.

Moka turned and gave him a dangerous look. "Shut your mouth. Don't you **dare** try and judge him."

Jiraiya let out a weary sigh. "Torture is a necessary part of a ninja's work Sasuke."

"I know that," Sasuke said. "But I saw the look in his eyes when he volunteered for this. He's enjoying it."

"And why shouldn't he?" Moka said coldly. "A man should enjoy making his enemies suffer before destroying them. That's something *you* should keep in mind Sasuke."

He clenched his fist and turned his shoulder to her. "Is that a threat?"

Jiraiya quickly stepped between them. "None of that, we're all on the same side here."

"Maybe you should remind the two of them of that. The way they act they seem to be their own little group." Annoyed at Jiraiya yet again interfering he turned and walked away.

Moka watched him leave contemptuously. "What kind of man runs away from every fight he doesn't expect to win?"

Sasuke's back stiffened, but he still left.

Moka looked at Jiraiya. "He really can't stand any sort of adversity can he? I've noticed that whenever things get difficult he makes a snide comment and runs away."

"You shouldn't say that," Jiraiya told her. "Sasuke is one of the strongest ninja I've ever met and he's not afraid of danger."

"He's not afraid to *fight*, but that's very different from having real courage." Moka said.

It was a couple hours before Naruto came into the clearing. He had some blood splattered on his face and clothes but seemed in a good mood. "Kabuto's run off to Mountain country."

Present Day

Shikaku looked about feeling uneasy. He and the other members of the Council were in a large conference room at the Namikaze mansion. There was a huge round table of finely polished dark oak with sixteen chairs surrounding it. The exact number needed for a full council and the Hokage. Looking about Shikaku frowned. "We seem to be a few short, and our hoist isn't here either."

"At least he left a nice spread for us." Choza was smiling and had a plate filled with little sandwiches and cookies.

"Aren't you at least a little nervous about this?" Shikaku told his old friend and teammate.

"Not really," Choza began to eat. "I'm just curious about what it's all about."

"His clone said something about treason before he disappeared."

"Treason?" Choza looked up from his plate. "Now that is interesting. Who is he accusing? Or is he confessing to something?"

"I have no idea, but you do know Sasuke never returned right?" Choza nodded. "This has to have some connection." Shikaku continued to look around the room.

"You look like you're in the field expecting to be ambushed."

Shikaku stepped closer and lowered his voice. "It's a possibility."

"*Here?*" Choza gasped and coughed as some of his food had gone down the wrong pipe. "You really think he would try something like that?"

"Let's just put it this way," Shikaku said grimly. "I don't really know what he might be capable of."

He door to the room opened and all conversation came to an immediate and abrupt halt. Naruto strode in wearing a white robe instead of his usual black clothing. The robe had no flames but was

of a cut much like the Hokage's. Wearing it all the older members were struck by the blatant similarity between him and their beloved Yondaime. Walking in on his heels was very quiet and nervous looking Hinata. She was looking about the room in obvious confusion.

"Thank you all for coming, since we're all here why don't we get started?" Naruto took a seat.

"Naruto-kun," Hinata said quietly. "My father isn't here yet. Shouldn't we wait for him?"

He turned in his chair to look at her. "I haven't sent him an invitation yet, things will go easier if we start without him. Don't worry I'll contact him when the time comes."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Shikaku asked warily.

"Just that the subject I'm bringing up is a bit delicate and things will go better if I can talk about it without the Hokage here."

"The Hokage is not the only one missing," Shino spoke in his calm steady voice. "Danzo, Homura, Koharu, and Ino are also not present."

"Again, their presence would make things more difficult." Naruto assured. "But with Hinata and myself here we have ten members, enough to meet the two thirds requirement for a quorum, so we can still pass decrees."

"Decrees aren't law without the Hokage's signature and seal." Shikaku pointed out.

"I know," Naruto said pleasantly. "My old sensei taught me that when I was eight." He waved to the seats. "Please trust me, what I have to say is very important and I promise you won't think it a waste of time."

Hinata was the first to sit, taking the chair to Naruto's right. Seeing her taking a seat the others followed her example one by one.

"So what is this about?" Shikaku asked. "Your clone said something about treason."

Apparently none of the other clones had said anything was there were whispers all along the table and eyes were turned sharply to Naruto to see how he would respond.

Naruto never batted an eyelash. If he was at all uncomfortable with the situation he didn't show it.

"That's right, this is about treason. But to begin I need to inform the council about what happened to Sasuke."

"Yes?" Shikaku asked. Like most of the Council he was eager to hear this.

Naruto smiled at them confidently. "Well, to put it simply, I killed him."

There was a moment of stunned silence. Then everyone was shouting and pointing at him, half of them were on their feet. Hinata was still seated and was just staring at him open mouthed. Unless she was putting on a great act she was as surprised as the rest.

Shikaku kept his seat and continued to eye Naruto. Naruto was still seated and seemed totally unconcerned with the reaction he had just caused. He almost seemed to be enjoying it.

"Is this why you called us here?" Shikaku said loudly. The other voices began to die down and order was restored. "To confess a crime? If you wanted to turn yourself in you should have reported to the Hokage not us."

"Turn myself in?" Naruto raised an eyebrow. "Why would I do that? I haven't committed a crime."

"I know you think you're above the law," Shikaku couldn't keep the anger from his voice. "But do you really think you can kill someone who was a council member, a clan head, and a hero and get away with it?"

Naruto looked directly at Shikaku. "It is no crime to execute a traitor, no matter what else he might be."

"YOU DARE?!!" Shikaku was on his feet glaring at the still seated and relaxed Naruto. "You dare to call Sasuke a traitor? You dare insult the memory of one of Konoha's most believed heroes?"

"You're starting to sound like Ino."

"Your accusation is a serious one," Shino remained one of the few calm voices in the room. "Can you offer up some proof besides your own testimony?"

"I'm so glad you asked that," He took a document out from one of the inner pockets of his robe and flicked it to the middle of the table. "That should be all the proof you need. I took that from Sasuke's cold dead hand. Orochimaru had given it to him and once Sasuke read it he swore he would join with Orochimaru and destroy Konoha."

"That is a lie!" Choza shouted. "Sasuke would never⁴ do such a thing he would never have betrayed his village."

Shikaku reached out and grabbed the document. Reading it he glared at Naruto again. "Is this your idea of a joke?!"

"That seal is authentic," Naruto said. "Cast a verification jutsu and see for yourself."

Shikaku did just that, the wax seal began to glow with a pale blue light. Shikaku felt his knees buckle and he fell back into his seat. "No... this isn't possible."

Naruto slowly nodded and seemed a bit saddened as well. "I know, I was shocked too, but the seal is the Third Hokage's. That document is valid."

Seeing Shikaku's reaction quieted everyone's attention and shifted their focus over to him.

"What the hell does it say?" Choza asked.

Wordlessly Shikaku handed the document over. Choza took it and read it. As he did so the color drained from his face.

"What is it?" Tsume called out.

It was Naruto who answered. "It is a signed order from the Third Hokage to Uchiha Itachi bearing not only his signature and seal but the signatures of Danzo, Homura, and Koharu it is an authorization for the massacre of the Uchiha clan."

The entire room was silent. One by one the document was passed around the table and every member, except Naruto, read it and confirmed that the seal really was authentic. Once it had made its way around the room Naruto spoke. "I trust you now understand why I called this meeting without Danzo, Homura, and Koharu; I also did not call the Hokage as he has close ties to the three of them who are loyal supporters. I did not want to place him in the awkward position of having to condemn them."

"You're just full of kindness aren't you?" Shikaku said bitterly. "You realize you've just destroyed Sarutobi's reputation don't you? I thought you at least had some sense of loyalty to him."

"If he were alive maybe I would have acted differently," Naruto said. "But maybe not too. He always believed he was responsible for his actions."

"What do you wish done now?" Shino asked, calm as ever.

"Danzo controls a large faction of ANBU who are absolutely loyal to him. If he is allowed to stand trial it will be an invitation to this group to either liberate him or perhaps instigates a civil war. Therefore to avenge the horrible crime of the Uchiha massacre and to protect the village from civil unrest I ask the Council to declare Danzo, Homura, and Koharu public enemies and authorize that they be killed on sight. Let them die without even the dignity of a trial or arrest, just as the Uchiha did."

Though sickened by what they had just learned the Council agreed with him that such would be justice. All ten members, including Shikaku, voted immediate death on their fellow council members.

Some you should kill with a lie

Seven Years Ago

Naruto looked up from his textbook frowning. "I don't get it."

Iruka peeked out of the kitchen where he was preparing dinner. He regularly assigned Naruto extra reading material on top of his regular studies. "What don't you get Naruto?"

"I'm reading the part about Motoko and the assassination of the emperor Jiang Heng."

Iruka nodded. "Yes, that took place about nine hundred years ago. It's a classic example of how anyone can be vulnerable to assassination. I studied it myself back when I was in the academy. What is it you don't understand?"

"Well the kunoichi Motoko infiltrated the imperial palace as a mistress to one emperor's sons and lived there for more than two years before the assassination, right?"

"That's correct," Iruka answered in what Naruto thought of as his, 'teacher' voice. "Over that time she gained the prince's trust and so was able to eventually convince him that his father intended to send him into exile. Believing that she was able to mastermind a coup attempt that resulted in the deaths of both the emperor and the prince."

"See, that's what I don't understand!"

"What do you mean?"

"She was living in the palace for *two years* why didn't she just use her ninja skills to kill the emperor?"

"Who was her employer?" Iruka asked in full teacher mode.

Frowning he looked back down at the text. "Ahhhh... Lord Cantu."

"Who was under suspicion and whose children were hostages being held in another castle. If the assassination attempt failed, or even if it had succeed and his involvement had been discovered his children would have died. To Lord Cantu that was an unacceptable risk. So he insisted on a method where neither he nor Motoko would be directly implicated."

"But instead she tricked someone who was in love with her into doing it!"

Iruka looked him. "And you disagree with that?"

"Well of course! Isn't it dishonorable and weak to trick others into doing your work for you?"

"Not at all Naruto," Iruka said. "We are not ancient samurai following bushido, we are ninja. A ninja does have honor, never doubt that, but for us honor comes from carrying out the mission whatever the cost and being loyal to those we serve. *How* we carry out the mission is irrelevant." He suddenly snapped out a question. "What is the lifeblood of ninja?"

"Deception!" Naruto answered immediately.

Iruka nodded. "If a lie or a trick will help you achieve your mission goal then it would be foolish not to use it. Not all enemies and not all situations will be the same. Some enemies you should kill face to face. Some you should kill with a kunai in the back. And some you should kill with a lie. A ninja's duty is to complete the mission with whatever method is most effective."

Naruto frowned but thought over the words carefully. "So it's all right to use people in order to accomplish the mission?"

"That's right," Iruka nodded. "It's a part of being ninja."

Present Day

The door to the conference room was pushed open and a very angry looking Hiashi entered wearing his full Hokage dress. Ten sets of eyes all turned to look at him.

"Hokage-sama, I'm so glad you could join us." Naruto rose from his seat and gave the Hokage a proper bow.

Hiashi's eyes narrowed when he saw what Naruto was wearing. *He is trying to play the part of the Yondaime's heir. Why? He has never cared about that before.* Hiashi's eyes quickly scanned the room taking note of who was present and the serious looks that answered him. He spared some extra attention for his daughter. Hinata quickly looked away.

"What is going on here?" The Fifth Hokage asked coolly. "Why was a meeting of the Council called, and why was I not informed of it?"

"The meeting was called to discuss a matter of high treason members of this very council. I trust you would agree that warranted an emergency session?" Naruto sounded reasonable and properly deferential. "As for not informing you sooner I thought that was best."

Hiashi approached Naruto and stared him down. "It is not wise to keep your supreme leader ignorant about such important matters. *That* could be considered treason."

Naruto met the Hokage's gaze easily enough and did not turn away. Their staring match was interrupted by Shino.

"Rest assured Hokage-sama deception is not our intent. The entire council agrees with the actions Naruto has proposed."

"Actions? What actions?" The Hokage ended their little contest to look at Shino.

"Valid evidence has been presented that council members Danzo, Homura, and Koharu were involved in the Uchiha massacre. The Council has passed a decree that they be declared public enemies and killed on sight."

Hiashi stared at the impassive face hidden behind a collar. If anyone else had said that Hiashi would have wondered if it was some type of joke. He looked about the room and saw every face looking back at him grim and resolute. They were serious.

"Have you all gone mad?" He asked them. "Naruto gives you some *evidence* and you're ready to execute fellow council members?"

"Unfortunately Hokage-sama, the evidence can't be disputed." Shikaku went over to him and handed the Sandaime's sealed order over to him.

Hiashi read the document. He then contemptuously tossed it onto the table. "Is this all the evidence you have? Some forged paper with a seal that *seems* to be real?" He looked at the council members and shook his head. "That scrap of paper..."

"Is valid," Naruto cut him off earning a glare which he ignored. "Every person in this room has had the chance to inspect it and cast a verification jutsu on it. As much as you might like to pretend it's not the fact is that document bears Sarutobi's seal. It *is* valid, everyone here realizes that."

Seeing general agreement from the faces in the room Hiashi tried a different tact. "Even *if* that is so, by itself it is not enough to condemn people to death. Especially not such respected and honored ninja. We will have to launch an investigation into these accusations."

"And who will be investigating? The ANBU? Will the investigators be trustworthy? Or will they be hidden Root members out to discredit any one who dares question Danzo and his compatriots? For that matter what will Danzo and his Root agents do while you investigate? Just stand by and watch?"

"Naruto does bring up a valid point," Shino stated. "A prolonged investigation will encourage action on the part of those loyal to Danzo."

Tsume jumped to her feet and looked at Hiashi angrily. "Are you going to let the Uchiha massacre go unpunished just to protect your friends?" She demanded. With her strong sense of loyalty and family she found the crime even more heinous than most. "We've written up three death warrants, we want you to sign and seal them."

"I will do no such thing." Hiashi stated.

"Are you really ready to risk a possible civil war just to protect your cronies?" Naruto asked him sadly. "Where is your concern for the innocent villagers?"

Hiashi turned on him sharply. "I do not want to hear **you** of all people talking about protecting the villagers."

"While I agree that Naruto isn't the one to talk about that the fact is it's a valid point," Shikaku sounded less than eager but pressed on. "The fact is that Danzo and his people are dangerous. Just arresting Danzo or even just investigating him might lead to an open revolt and civil war. For the sake of peace within the village please sign the warrants Hokage-sama."

"I will do no such thing," he repeated. "I will not blindly order the deaths of three honored ninja simply because of one piece of paper and the urgings of a bloodthirsty killer."

Naruto grinned. "Oh dad that hurts." He theatrically put a hand over his heart. "But whatever you call me still doesn't change the fact that the Hokage's order *proves* that Danzo, Homura, and Koharu are complicit in the Uchiha massacre. Justice demands they be punished, and peace demands that the punishment be swift and severe. Anything less will only cause greater suffering."

"I am prepared to see them investigated," Hiashi hated conceding even that much. "But they will not be arrested, never mind executed."

"So to protect your friends and your powerbase you are ready to put the entire village in danger?" Naruto asked and shook his head sadly.

"I will **not** allow the Uchiha massacre to go unpunished just for the sake of some political advantage," Tsume barked out. "If you will not do what must be done then I will order my clan to act."

"As will I," Shino said calmly. "The laws of this village must be upheld and the guilty forced to answer for their crimes."

Shikaku took a deep breath. "As much as I hate to say it, I agree."

One by one the various members of the council declared their intentions to carry out the executions even without the Hokage's approval.

Hinata was the only one not to declare her support. Instead she sat rigidly in her seat and remained silent, her eyes darting between Naruto and her father.

For his part Naruto grinned. "Do I even need to say how I feel?"

Hiashi was horrified to find people he had worked closely with for years turning on him. "Do you understand what it is you are saying? If you do this you will be acting outside the law and bringing on the very thing you want to avoid! I cannot stand by and allow you to oppose my authority. Your actions will lead to civil war!" However reluctantly they were drawing up battle lines with most of the clans to one side and Hyuuga and most of the other ninja on the other. Hiashi again turned to Naruto. "Is this what you were aiming for?"

Naruto looked surprised by the accusation. "You think I want civil war?" He shook his head. "All I want is justice, that is all I have ever

really wanted."

"No one here seeks civil war Hokage-sama," Shino said in his monotone. "However we cannot stand aside and allow this issue to pass. It must be resolved."

"Can you do the right thing for once?" Tsume demanded. "Think about the villagers and not yourself."

"Are you all resolved to this course?" Hiashi asked grimly.

Nine heads bobbed up and down. Hinata remained still and looked miserable.

"Then it seems I have no choice, give me the warrants."

Taking the papers he quickly and mechanically signed and sealed them. As Naruto watched he smiled just a bit. *It's done*, he thought happily. *Not only do I get rid of those three but I'll actually get some credit for a change. I warned you not to betray me Danzo.*

Four Days Ago

Smoke was beginning to fill the corridors as the ground shook again from another explosion. Orochimaru's secret mountain base was starting to collapse all around him. He could only flee and hope to run into the other two. Coming to a dead end he reared back and punched through the false wall. He found himself in another vast chamber.

"Naruto!"

Looking over he saw her. "Moka-chan!" There was a body near her so it was obvious she'd been in a fight. "Are you all right?!" He ran over to her, relieved and happy to have found her. He was a bit surprised though that while there was blood on her there was much more ink.

"What happened?" She asked him. "We were in the corridor and the floor suddenly gave way. I wound up here where I was attacked." She nodded towards the corpse. Naruto had a clear look at the boy's pale face. He let out a growl. "What is it? Do you know him?"

"Yeah I know him," Naruto ground out. "His name was Sai; he was one of Danzo's agents. It looks like Sasuke was telling the truth; Danzo and the others betrayed me. The second I get back to the village they're all dead."

"You were with Sasuke?"

He nodded once, his fury still high. "Yeah the two of us were dumped in a chamber like this one, only with Orochimaru waiting for us."

"What happened?" She asked.

"I killed them both."

"You killed Sasuke?" Moka asked fearfully. "Oh Naruto-kun we can't go back there now. He's like a little tin god to them, they'll never forgive you."

Another explosion echoed all around them as chunks of the stone ceiling began to fall in. "Let's talk about this later," he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. "Right now let's get out of here before we end up buried alive."

She nodded and they were swallowed up by black flames.

Present Day

With the death warrants now signed the meeting quickly broke up as the council members hurried to see them carried out. Hiashi watched and waited as the others departed. He did not fail to notice that most of the members still avoided Naruto as they left. But there were two important exceptions, both Tsume and Shino stopped to speak with

him for a bit before they went. It was very interesting to see the most emotional and the most stoic council members apparently find some common ground.

Naruto was among the last to leave, along with Hinata.

"If you don't mind Naruto, I'd like a moment alone with you."

Naruto turned and nodded. "Of course Hokage-sama."

Hinata looked over hopefully. "Should I..."

"You are not needed," Hiashi said dismissively.

Flinching a bit she turned and escaped, leaving Hiashi and Naruto as the only ones still in the room.

"You know Naruto," Hiashi began. "I knew you were dangerous from the very beginning. But I must admit that you are dangerous in ways I never suspected."

He bowed his head a bit. "I will take that as a compliment."

"Just what sort of game are you playing?"

Naruto smiled. "I am but a humble servant of my village."

Hiashi snorted. "Humility is no part of your character, of that much I am certain. And you only serve when you are forced to."

"Father you wound me."

"Call me that once more and I will activate your seal and leave it on for a full hour," Hiashi said menacingly.

Naruto was *strongly* tempted to call him dad right then, but he resisted the urge. It was important that Hiashi still believe he had a weak spot. "Yes, Hokage-sama."

"What is it you really want? What are you truly after?"

"I only want to be embraced by the village, I just want to be accepted and loved."

"A good first step to that would be to stop killing villagers."

Naruto grinned. "I agree, so long as they don't try and attack me."

"If you are serious about being accepted there is something that you could do to aid that."

"Get Hinata pregnant?" Naruto said neutrally. "Godfather brought that up so many times you would have thought he was a nurse maid looking for work. As I told him a hundred times, I may care for Hinata but my heart belongs only to Moka."

"Your heart need not be involved," Hiashi said. "What is required is a different part of your anatomy."

"Sorry, Naruto chuckled. "I'm afraid Moka considers *that* part to be hers too. In fact she's thinking of having, 'property of Moka' stamped on it."

"So you are saying you never intend to share my daughter's bed?"

"I said that from the start, and nothing has changed."

"I see, very well then I will go. But you need to understand one thing very clearly Naruto. If you become a serious threat to me I will annihilate you. Keep that very clearly in mind."

"Yes Hokage-sama."

Hiashi left and Naruto was alone. With no one watching he began to laugh. *More dangerous than you expected? You have no fucking idea.*

What does the truth matter

Author's Note: Happy Thanksgiving everyone! I wish everyone out there a safe and happy holiday. And of course, as we all know, nothing says Thanksgiving like turkey, foot ball, and stories about cold hearted revenge and murder. Enjoy!

Four Days Ago

The black flames died away and the two of them were safely on the mountain side. As they watched the cave that was the secret entrance collapsed sealing up the only way out. As the ground continued to shake beneath their feet Naruto looked around. They were the only ones present.

"It looks like godfather didn't make it."

No sooner had Naruto spoken than the stony ground about fifty yards away burst open. A large orange and black toad tore its way out of the mountainside with a dusty Jiraiya holding on to his back. Seeing the miraculous escape Naruto actually shook his head in admiration. *I guess the old guy really is tougher than he seems.*

Once they were all clear and the shaking finally stopped Jiraiya turned to him. "Do you have any idea what happened to Sasuke?"

Naruto nodded. "He and I wound up facing Orochimaru together. I'm afraid he was killed before I could finish off Orochimaru."

"He's dead?" Jiraiya whispered.

Naruto nodded. "He died bravely though."

Jiraiya slowly shook his head. "This is terrible; the Uchiha clan is extinct now. He was my student and I failed him."

"Nice to see you so worried about one of your students."

"Naruto! This is no time for petty jealousy! Your teammate just died! Have a little compassion!"

Naruto stared back at him. *You expect me to have compassion for him? The whole damn village will mourn for him. If it were me would anyone except Moka and maybe Hinata even care?* "I'm sorry he's dead," Naruto lied.

Despite many differences with his other student Jiraiya seemed genuinely upset. He insisted on knowing exactly how Sasuke had died. Naruto found himself having to invent a story of how brave Sasuke had met his end. It annoyed him to no end to see just how worried Jiraiya was with the dead Sasuke, while not giving a thought to how the village would likely react to **him** when the news came out. Moka was right when she said the village would blame him.

Present Day

The meeting had ended about half an hour ago when a furious Jiraiya arrived and demanded to meet with him. Naruto called him into his study so the two of them could talk in private. Jiraiya wasted no time in making his accusation.

"You lied to me! You told me that Sasuke was killed by Orochimaru but you told the Council that you killed him yourself."

"That's right godfather, I lied to you. So what? Are you going to stand there and pretend you haven't told me a few lies? How about the very first day we met? 'I'm here to help you Naruto.' 'This seal will allow you to draw more of the Kyuubi's power.' 'I'm sorry.'"

"Damn it Naruto! What I did was because of orders from the Hokage!"

"And what I did was for my own protection. What would have happened if I'd told you I'd killed Sasuke? I assume it would have been your duty to tell the Hokage right? Would the reasons have mattered or would everyone have just turned on me?"

"I am your sensei Naruto, telling lies to me is very different than telling them to someone else."

"Are you sure?" Naruto asked. "Because it didn't seem very different to me. We're ninja, for us lying comes as easy as breathing."

Jiraiya stared hard at him. "What really happened Naruto?"

Four Days Ago

Naruto and Sasuke had been dropped through a trap door and slide into a large chamber. They had scrambled back up to their feet. The place was a huge circular room filled with stone columns. The only light came from a few torches on the far wall. The light was weak and the place was filled with shadows. Naruto was in his vampiric form, he looked about as his eyes adjusted to the darkness.

"What's that smell?" Sasuke said with disgust.

"Quiet," Naruto told him. He could smell it too. It was the familiar scent of rotting meat. There was at least one corpse somewhere in this room.

"Ku. Ku, ku," a voice rasped from somewhere in the shadows.
"You've finally come; I've waited too long for this."

Naruto and Sasuke both turned to face the sound. Not willing to take anymore chances Naruto embraced the Kyuubi's power. He activated his cloak and six tails took form.

"Who are you?' Naruto called out.

The figure moved out from behind a column and shuffled slowly towards them. With his vampiric vision Naruto was able to see him clearly despite the darkness. What he saw made him want to vomit. The man, if he was still that, was wearing an old dirty robe and had bandages covering most of his arms and legs. But the skin that was still showing was black and rotting. He seemed to be more like a rotting corpse than a living being. The only place that seemed alive was the face. The mouth twisted and smiled, and the yellow snake eyes were looking at him with a very human hunger.

"It hurts you know, it hurts, but I had to wait. Wait for my chance. With your power I will live forever and kill all those fools."

"Who the fuck are you?" Naruto asked. He had to fight the urge not to vomit. There were times when a strong sense of smell was a real curse.

The question brought out a cackle filled with sickness and madness. "Who am I? Who am I? Ku, ku, ku I am the great Orochimaru. Now, give me your body and your power."

Sasuke watched as what seemed like a gigantic snake made of chakra appeared above Orochimaru's head. It towered above Naruto and seemed to strike to devour him. But the image of a fox appeared and attacked the snake. As Sasuke stood there watching both men were completely immobile while the two images seemed to fight each other.

Sasuke stood there and watched carefully. Whatever was happening if they wound up killing each other that would solve everything.

For Naruto it was as though he'd suddenly been teleported to another realm. The man standing in front of him was the Orochimaru from the Bingo Book, healthy and young.

"You have no hope of resisting me here," Orochimaru teased. "This is a dimension I created for the devouring of souls. I will take over your body and the power that you possess. Then I will finally take my revenge on Konoha."

"You want to take revenge on Konoha?" Naruto grunted. "I can respect that. But I'm afraid I can't give you my body, I'm not done using it yet."

"Ku, ku, ku I am glad that my new host has such courage, you will make a fitting receptacle for me. Now don't try to resist, here my will is all that matters."

As Orochimaru spoke the ground around him began sliding up his body and covering him. "I see, this place reacts to will? In that case you are really and truly fucked." The muddy earth seemed to hesitate and then began to drip off.

Orochimaru gasped in surprise as the earth around his feet began to rise up his legs. "Fool you really think you can challenge me here?"

"I didn't come to challenge you I came to fucking kill you and pay you back for what you did to the old man."

Orochimaru glared at him hatefully and concentrated. He gasped in surprise as the muddy earth continued on up from his legs onto his chest. "What is happening? I am the legendary Orochimaru! I am immortal! You cannot hope to defeat me!"

Naruto laughed at him. "What? Did you really think you were the only one filled with rage and hate? I have plenty of that too, and I have one thing that you don't that guarantees my will to live is stronger than yours."

"Wha... what is it?" He looked and sounded scared; the earth was climbing up his neck.

"I have someone I love, someone who is more important to me than my own life. That's a source of strength that you don't have." He watched as the mud began covering his enemy's face. "Now please die."

As Sasuke watched the image of the fox suddenly tore off the snake's head. There was a gasp and he heard more than saw Orochimaru collapse. The image of the fox and snake vanished. Much more importantly Naruto's chakra cloak also disappeared. Naruto collapsed to his knees panting.

"You all right?" Sasuke called out.

Between breaths Naruto nodded. "Yeah... fine... that, that was a lot harder than I expected."

Somewhere beneath them they hear the faint echo of an explosion and the faint rumble of the ground shaking. "Looks like Orochimaru must have set this place up to self destruct if he died. We need to get out of here. Can you use the Kyuubi's chakra?"

Naruto shook his head. "Not right now."

"Good," Sasuke purred. "That's what I was waiting to hear." The sounds of birds chirping suddenly filled the chamber drowning out the explosions.

Naruto understood. He got shakily back up to his feet and looked at Sasuke as he formed his raikiri. "So, is this for your balls or because godfather offered me the summons?"

"Neither idiot! This is for stealing Itachi from me and robbing me of my destiny!"

Naruto laughed at him. "Aw you poor thing, my heart bleeds for you. It must be soooo hard having to just settle for being rich, powerful, and admired. I can see why you need to kill since someone took

away your play thing. You're so pathetic Sasuke. You're nothing but a spoiled rich kid who can't stand not to get everything he wants."

"Shut up! What would a monster like you know anyway?"

"Yeah I'm a monster Sasuke," Naruto admitted with a grim laugh.
"But unlike you I have real reasons to hate and kill."

"We all have our reasons; Danzo is trying to protect himself. You should know he betrayed you too, and as soon as you're dead Moka is going to have a little accident. Once you're gone they'll probably have a festival to celebrate."

"I don't doubt it, so you and Danzo had a little conspiracy. Anyone else join in?"

Sasuke smiled. "No, but I'm sure we could have recruited the whole village if we'd needed to. Everyone wants you dead."

"I know, and the feelings mutual."

A large explosion made the floor shake sent a crack through it.
"Enough of this, it's time for you to die."

Sasuke had his sharingan active and ran straight at him intending to plunge his lightning blade into Naruto's heart. Without the Kyuubi's power he was nothing. He saw Naruto look right at him and smile. And in the next instant he seemed to disappear.

Crack!

In the very next instant he felt the wrist with his raikiri snap. He tried to cry out but there was a hand clenching his throat tight. He tried to cry out but nothing would come out but a gasp.

"You know what Sasuke? I think I'd rather be a monster than an arrogant weakling like you. Did you really think you were a match for me even without my red chakra? Your eyes may show you a lot of things, but what good does it do you if you can't match my speed?"

He put his lips next to Sasuke's ear and whispered. "And so you know... Itachi would have crushed you easily. Say hi to him for me."

With that he snapped Sasuke's neck and put a final end to the Uchiha clan.

Present Day

"You want to know what really happened?" Naruto asked.

"That's right," Jiraiya said angrily. "I want to know the truth."

"The truth?" Naruto asked. "What the hell would you do with it? This whole village runs on lies. What does the truth matter?"

"It matters because need to know why you did it."

Naruto looked at him. "You really want to know? I killed him because he tried to kill me first. I defeated Orochimaru but it left me drained. When he saw I was vulnerable he came at me. But I wasn't as helpless as he thought."

Jiraiya stared at him. "Is that really what happened?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you tell me that from the start?"

"Because a lie was safer."

Jiraiya considered for a moment. "I don't believe you."

Naruto shrugged. "I'm not surprised; I am a liar after all, like you and everyone else in this place."

"What about the document was that real?"

"Of course, there's no way to falsify a Hokage's seal."

"And you really did take it from Sasuke after he was given it by Orochimaru?"

Naruto looked him right in the eye and answered. "Yes."

Play time is over

It was called the night of the long knives. Homura and Koharu had been dealt with easily. But somehow Danzo had discovered the plot against him and summoned his Root agents to make a fight of it. A small battle had erupted in the middle of the village as the regular ANBU and clans were called in to put them down. Whatever Hiashi might have thought of executing Danzo he had no qualms about killing the Root agents who were in revolt. The ANBU were the personal weapons of the Hokage, for them to show greater loyalty to another was rank treason. Hiashi ordered no prisoners taken.

The fighting in the middle of Konoha lasted through the night. When it was over more than a hundred leaf nins were dead and Danzo and his organization were exterminated. Naruto had generously offered his help in putting down the revolt. He'd guaranteed to kill them all quickly and easily. It was *because* Hiashi was afraid Naruto would do just that, that he specifically ordered him **not** to join in the fighting. The last thing the Hokage wanted was for people to witness Naruto slaughtering leaf nins with the Kyuubi's power.

The next morning, as bodies were still being pulled from the wreckage, the Hokage ordered both Naruto and Hinata to meet with him separately at the tower. His meeting with Hinata was the earlier one and the quicker one.

"I have decided to remove you from the Council," Hiashi told her bluntly. "From this point on your sister Hanabi will function both as clan head and representative on the Council."

"But... but why? Father I thought I was doing just as you wanted."

He looked at her coldly with those pale eyes of his. Seeing that she flinched and looked away. "You are so weak," he told her. "You have always been weak Hinata, but at least you had always been

obedient and not *too* stupid. Since you are well liked by the other members I thought you could be trusted to watch my interests on the Council. But instead you helped Naruto with that mockery in council that led to all those pointless deaths of precious ninja."

"But... but father I... I didn't know what he was going to do. He... he didn't trust me with his plans."

Hiashi snorted. "Of course he didn't! Unlike you Naruto can see things that not right in front of him. He would have to be an idiot like you to not realize you cannot be trusted."

She flinched again, not just at his harsh words but at the thought that Naruto didn't trust her. *But why should he?* She thought sadly. *Even though I really love him haven't I been spying on him the entire time we've been together?*

"Wha... what could I ha... have done?"

"Did it even occur to you to simply get up and leave?" His words were sharp and to the point. "Ten members are the minimum needed to form a quorum. Without which the Council becomes nothing more than a debate society. Had you simply left they would not have had a quorum, they would not have been able to issue those decrees, and I might have been able to gain enough time to convince the members that they were being hasty. Instead I was forced to sign those warrants or face a revolt from the clans."

"But if I had walked out Naruto would have been angry with me!"

Her father just stared at her. "How did someone with such a soft heart ever become a ninja?" He shook his head. "I should have been much harder on you when you were growing up."

"You were hard enough father," she said quietly.

"Go Hinata," he turned back to the paperwork on his desk. "You are no longer a Council member; try to at least do something useful. See

if you can convince him to at least visit your bed at some point. Surely he can't find you *that* repulsive."

She left feeling crushed and worthless, a common occurrence when she had meetings with her father.

When Naruto arrived Hiashi was cautious and wary. Unlike his daughter Naruto was someone who understood all the lessons of being ninja. Had his personality been different he might have been a huge asset to the village. He still was an asset, but an increasingly dangerous one. *He has six tails now, how much longer can I afford to keep him alive?*

Hiashi held out a report to Naruto. "Read this, it was delivered to me this morning after it was announced Danzo was dead.

Naruto took the lengthy document and carefully began to read through it. Hiashi sat back and calmly waited to see what the reaction would be.

When Naruto finished reading it he handed it back. "Well I suppose I should have expected something like that from Danzo, the man loved to lie."

"So you deny the claims lodged against you? You deny blackmailing Danzo, Homura, and Koharu with the very order you told the Council you took from Sasuke. You deny having Fukashi kidnapped and delivered to you? You deny using Danzo to access classified information regarding the ninja and clans of this village? You deny all of it?"

Naruto shrugged and then covered up a yawn. "Sure, why not?"

"You seem very flippant given the serious nature of these charges."

Naruto grinned and flicked a finger at the report lying open on the desk. "Why would I be worried? What would the lies of a dead man,

no, a dead traitor matter? He found out I'd learned the truth about him and this was his pathetic attempt to strike back at me."

"I am strongly considering having you arrested and letting Ibiki interrogate you. That way I could find out the truth."

Naruto's smile was as cold and unforgiving as a winter storm. "I won't let myself be arrested or interrogated. If you cross that line know there'll be no going back."

Beneath his desk Hiashi prepared to cast a hand sign. "Is that a threat?"

"Of course not!" Naruto said cheerfully. "I would no sooner threaten my Hokage than you would consider betraying me."

Hiashi frowned at him. "I cannot tell you how much those words comfort me." He reached out and closed the folder. "I will ignore these accusations, at least for now. After the casualties suffered from last night the village is a bit short-handed. I will need you to perform some missions for me. Unfortunately I have other missions planned for Jiraiya, would you object to handling them alone?"

"Not at all."

"Good," Hiashi took out a different file from a desk drawer. "Read that over, you'll be leaving tomorrow, and you're to go *without* Moka."

"Tomorrow? But I only got back yesterday."

"The life of a ninja is a hard one," Hiashi said. "Especially for our most powerful. I intend to keep you very busy. Now, of course if certain circumstances were to arise I might allow you to spend more time in the village."

"Certain circumstances?" Naruto asked suspiciously.

"If, let us say, Hinata were to find herself with child I am sure she would want you close by to support and comfort her. I am not a man

without feeling."

"I see, well then I had better get home and get ready for my mission. May I go Hokage-sama?"

Hiashi nodded.

Naruto suddenly transformed into a vampire and then disappeared in a swirl of black fire.

Hiashi stiffened in his seat. What Naruto had just done was an insult. When your Hokage dismissed you, you stepped out of his office before performing any sort of jutsu. And Naruto had made a point by teleporting without performing a jutsu. Instead he had used one of his demonic abilities. Hiashi knew he was too smart to have done that by mistake. He'd been sending a message. He was subtly reminding the Hokage that he had powers that were different from an ordinary ninja's and that the everyday rules did not apply to him.

So he thinks he can insult me with impunity? I'll keep him constantly out of the village. He won't spend more than one night at home between missions. Let's see how he enjoys that.

Tayuya was humming to herself as she dusted. It had been two months since Naruto and Moka had come back home. Since then Naruto had been away on eleven missions, each one coming right after the other. She noted that Naruto always returned early in the morning, so that he got to spend a whole day with Moka before having to leave again.

Tayuya also noticed that the missions themselves had changed. At first they had been A-rank missions involving assassination against well protected targets. They were supposed to be very difficult and dangerous, but Naruto had his own unique way of handling them.

Six Weeks Ago

The Hokage arrived at the mansion only a couple hours after Naruto's return.

"Naruto! What were you thinking?!" Hiashi demanded.

"About what Hokage-sama?" Naruto answered innocently.

Hiashi glared at him. "Your mission was to kill a minor court official, a simple straightforward assassination."

"I know that Hokage-sama," Naruto replied. "I carried out my mission successfully and returned to the village."

"You call that fiasco a success? You leveled an entire castle! You wiped out the whole local court including the rival official who was the employer!" Hiashi said furiously.

"Which killed the target," Naruto shrugged. "I can't be expected to worry about collateral damage." Naruto smiled. "Of course since I've been so busy I just don't seem to have the time to waste with more subtle methods. Now, if I had fewer missions..."

The Hokage's response to that had been to assign him to an escort mission that left the following morning. Since then Naruto had been given nothing but escort and retrieval missions that were time consuming but not especially dangerous.

Tayuya discovered that she was pretty happy with her life. Despite her work she was given a free day once a week and had plenty of money thanks to all her, 'spy' work. Naruto was a little scary at times, but unlike Orochimaru he wasn't crazy. So long as she wasn't stupid enough to actually betray him she felt safe enough. With Naruto gone most of the time Moka used her for a snack regularly. She still didn't like that but had at least gotten used to it. The important thing was that working here she didn't feel like a prisoner. She was her own person and was free to do as she wanted, for the most part. She had even gotten used to wearing a frilly little maid's outfit.

The door bell chimed and she put down her dust brush to go and answer it. When she opened the door there was a beautiful young woman standing there in a fancy gold and silver gown. She had long flowing orange hair that reminded her of that nasty little Kokoa. But what really caught Tayuya's attention were her blood red eyes.

"Hi there!" The woman chirped. "Is Moka-chan here? Could you tell her that her big sister Karua needs to see her?"

As soon as Tayuya had told her who had arrived Moka had gotten a very bad feeling deep in the pit of her stomach. Karua was her half sister, having the same father but a different mother. She was Kokoa's full biological sister. Karua was actually quite nice most of the time. She usually had a big smile and seemed just a bit silly and over eager. But her big sister could also be brutal when the mood took her, especially when she began to cry. Unlike with Kokoa the two of them had never really been that close. *Why is she here? And why now?* Whatever the reason if she was here there was no choice but to go and see her.

As soon as she spotted Moka coming down the stairs Karua began jumping about and applauding. "Oooh! Little sister, little sister, look how you've grown up! You're so beautiful now! I'm so happy!"

Moka stiffened a little as Karua gave her an eager hug. "What are you doing here Karua?"

Karua let go and a slight frown tugged at the edges of her lips. "Awww, aren't you happy to see me?"

"Of course I am," Moka said a smile she didn't really feel. "But it has been a long time. Is there a special reason why you are here?"

The little frown was again swallowed up by her lopsided grin. "I was expecting to find you wearing that rosary your mom gave you. Kokoa was always complaining that the real you was locked away and there

was a pink haired imposter running around in your place. After the last time Little Kokoa came back she didn't say anything about you being back to normal or living in a mansion. Did little Moka get tired of being a school girl?"

Moka felt a little relieved that Kokoa hadn't said anything. "Yes, I got tired of school and decided to try something different."

"And what is that little Moka?" Karua pointed to the framed picture on the wall. "It looks like a wedding portrait." Karua grabbed her sister's left wrist and brought her hand in front of her face. "And is that a wedding ring?!" She cried out excitedly. "Are you married?" She was jumping about excited.

"Y... yes I'm married. I met someone very special and I fell in love with him. We've been together for more than a year now and he makes me very happy."

Karua laughed and applauded happily. "This is wonderful! Oh little Moka it's like you knew why I was coming! This is so wonderful! This is so wonderful!"

"Karua," Moka spoke carefully. She could be very impulsive and flighty at times. She needed to keep her from doing something rash. "Can you please keep this a secret from everyone else? Only me you and Kokoa know and I'd like to keep it that way."

She suddenly stopped jumping about. "Ooooh, little Kokoa knew about this and didn't tell big sister? That makes me very cross. I will have to punish her when I get back for keeping such a good secret from me."

"She kept it a secret because I asked her to; please don't punish her for that."

Karua eyed her with one of her very rare contemplative looks. "You've changed some little Moka. It used to be you wouldn't have cared if I punished her."

"I suppose I have changed, I've learned about friendship, life, and love. I suppose I've grown up." Moka told her seriously.

Karua laughed and her lopsided grin returned. "Awww, that is so sweet! And the timing is so perfect! Daddy said it was time for you to grow up."

"Father said that?" Moka asked nervously. Father having thoughts about her was not good.

Karua nodded enthusiastically. "That's why this is all so wonderful! You got to have a practice marriage to get ready!"

Moka felt cold fear fill her chest. "My marriage isn't pretend and it isn't practice, it's real and it means everything to me."

Karua burst out laughing. "Oh little Moka! You finally have a sense of humor! Daddy will be so pleased! And so will your future husband! He's really cute and he can't wait to meet you!"

"No! I have a husband! There's no way I'm leaving him."

Karua tilted her head grinned as she took a step closer to her sister. "That's not funny little Moka. Daddy let you go off and play but now he says you have to be an adult and fulfill your responsibilities. I won't tell him your naughty little secret if you don't want. But daddy sent me here to bring you home and get you ready for your wedding, your real wedding. Now let's go, daddy doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"No! I won..."

Karua slammed a fist into Moka's stomach that knocked the air out of her and dropped her to her knees. She then hauled her younger sister up and tossed her over a shoulder. "Don't be that way little Moka, you know how cross daddy can get. Play time is over. Now, let's go get you married!" Black flames formed at Karua's feet and swallowed the two of them up.

When the flames were gone they were as well.

A message

The sun was only just above the horizon as he saw the gates to the village looming in front of him. He'd been escorting an idiot merchant and his caravan to Grass country, yet another boring C-rank escort mission, when he'd received a messenger bird from the village. It had been an impromptu order telling him to cancel the mission and return to the village immediately. That had caught him completely by surprise, as a general rule ninja **never** broke a contract. The fact that there was no hint as to why he was being ordered back didn't help. He didn't like surprises; in his life surprises were almost always bad.

So he'd left the merchant and started back immediately, running at top speed for the rest of the day and into the night. Deciding to rely on his inhuman stamina he'd just kept going without any sleep. So after about eighteen hours he was finally returning just after dawn. When he reached the gate he was not surprised to get instructions to head for the tower. The fact he was given a four man ANBU escort did catch his attention though, something was definitely up.

When he arrived at the tower it looked like the place was under siege. It was completely surrounded by ANBU. From beneath their various masks they watched him as he entered the tower.

Inside the tower was surprisingly empty. Usually there were people everywhere carrying orders, seeking audience, working at their stations doing whatever the hell it was bureaucrats did. But this morning there seemed only a bare minimum of personnel at their work stations. As he walked past them on his way to the Hokage's office they would stop and look up. That was not really unusual, he always drew attention. But this morning there was more fear in their faces than usual. He could smell it in their scents too, a stink of fear so bad it caught his attention. *Why are they suddenly so afraid?* In general those who worked here felt safe as they were under the Hokage's immediate protection. But for some reason they didn't feel that security now. *What the hell is going on?*

There was only a single secretary at her desk as he approached the office itself. The nine other desks were empty and he immediately noted that there were no guards outside the Hokage's door. In fact he had not spotted a single other ninja since stepping inside the Tower. His little escort had joined their fellows ringing the tower and let him enter alone. *Is this all some sort of trap? If it is I'll level this fucking place.* The lone secretary waved him to the door and he entered it ready for anything.

Inside the office a single man was waiting for him, but it wasn't the one he'd expected.

"Hello Naruto," Jiraiya said solemnly. "We need to have a serious talk."

"Where's the Hokage? Why isn't he here too?" Finding Jiraiya here was not surprising at all. But he had never entered this room before without the Hokage being present, and that included back to when he was a small child visiting Sarutobi.

"The Hokage is... elsewhere," Jiraiya looked uncomfortable at the admission. "The truth is kid..."

"Don't call me kid," Naruto told him.

"Put aside that fucking pride of yours for a second and listen to me," Jiraiya said sharply. "Your life is hanging by a thin thread."

Naruto was caught off guard by Jiraiya's reaction. His first instinct was to say something rude to the pervert, but he held back. Something was going on and he needed to know what. "All right, *Jiraiya*, why don't you explain to me what's happened?"

"Before I even get into that there's something else you need to know first." Jiraiya said. "The Hokage has shared the secret about your chest seal with five ANBU he trusts. He didn't dare share it with too many since one of them might just decide it's worth dying to go ahead and kill you without orders. So there are now five ANBU who

can kill you with a hand sign, and they will if you show any disobedience whatsoever."

So it really is a trap, and that gutless coward Hiashi didn't even have the courage to face me down himself. Though he was furious he was careful not to let it show. He kept his anger and his killer intent carefully in check. "I see," Naruto spoke with a calm that was a lie. "And just what exactly do the Hokage want of me?"

Jiraiya knew the calm face he was looking at was a lie. He proceeded carefully. "He wants obedience Naruto. He wants you to do as you're told and to stop causing trouble for him. He has decided that you will not be sent on any more missions, and if you attempt to leave this village you will be declared a missing nin and killed on sight. You are not to attack villagers or call special meetings of the Council or break any other law of the village, if you do so you will be killed." Jiraiya took a deep breath. "He also wants Hinata to be pregnant with your child within three months or..."

"I'll be killed," Naruto said flatly. "Yeah, got it, but if I try anything along those lines Moka will kill me immediately."

Jiraiya blanched. "About that Naruto, I'm afraid Moka has left."

Naruto blinked; sure he must have heard that wrong. "Left what the hell are you talking about?" Some killer intent began to leak out of him. "If the Hokage did something to her..."

"No! It's nothing like that. Apparently Moka's sister Karua came and she with her, that was two days ago. She left without warning and there's nothing to indicate when or if she will return."

"I don't believe you, Moka would *never* abandon me!"

"It's true kid, you can talk to Tayuya about it. She didn't see them leave but she did see the sister arrive. She went to talk to her and shortly after that they were both gone." Jiraiya shrugged. "Maybe she'll be back soon, who knows. But whether she comes back or not

you can't leave to go look for her. The Hokage decided that with her gone this would be a good time for you to learn your place within the village."

Naruto snarled a bit. "Oh I know my place here, I always have. And now the Hokage wants to turn me into his fucking pet, huh?"

"Naruto, if you try anything, and I mean anything at all, you really are going to die! The Hokage is completely serious about getting your obedience. He will no longer tolerate you as any sort of threat."

"I never should have come back to this damn village," he muttered. "I understand." He turned to leave. "Tell the Hokage I'll be a good little boy." *For now.*

He returned home to confront Tayuya. She quickly told him everything she knew, which was not much. A woman with orange hair and red eyes had arrived claiming to be Moka's sister Karua. Moka had recognized the description and gone to talk to her. Tayuya had come back twenty minutes later looking for Moka to discover that she and her sister were both gone. Tayuya had searched the mansion but found no trace. Finally she'd reported things to the authorities. Naruto knew Tayuya feared him too much to dare make up a story like that. Besides he'd picked up a two day old scent of a woman who was definitely vampire. So *someone* had come here and taken Moka away by force. Naruto was convinced it had to have been by force. If there had been some sort of emergency Moka would have left a message for him. She would never have just disappeared like this.

After getting all the information he could he headed up to the roof to be alone for awhile.

From the roof he looked out upon the village. He was trying to sort through things and come up with a definite plan. The Hokage's threat, by itself, meant nothing. He could have all the ANBU in the

village make that same hand sign at once and it wouldn't do anything. But the fact that Hiashi had gone so far was a clear sign it was time to go. If the Hokage ever realized the chest seal didn't work he would mount an attack with every ninja in the village. It was time for him to leave. He would need to take care of a few things before he left, and there was the question of where to go.

Those things were secondary though. What mattered was finding Moka. And as he stood there he felt and then saw black flames.

"Hi idiot."

"Kokoa! What are you doing here?! Do you know what happened to Moka?"

"Why do you think I'm here?" She sounded annoyed. "Do you think I came here for your sparkling wit and personality? I'm here as a favor to my beautiful and amazing sister." She tossed him something. "Here, catch."

He snapped it out of the air and saw it was a simple band of gold. He recognized it instantly. "Moka-chan's wedding ring."

Kokoa nodded. "Neesan begged me to come here and return that to you with a message. She wants you to know that she loves you and always will, but that she's letting you out of your promise. She wants you to be happy with someone else, either with Hinata or some other girl. Neesan says she wants you to forget about her."

"What the hell are you talking about?! Forget about her? I love her more than anything in this world I know she feels the same! I love her and I could never forget about her!"

Kokoa's eyes looked sad and she seemed to lose some of her spirit. "I know you do, and even though you're an idiot neesan loves you too, that's why I'm here and that's why you need to forget about her. Our father ordered her to come home so she could get married."

"Married?! What the hell are you talking about?! I'm her husband! She's already married!"

"Not as far as father is concerned." Kokoa said grimly. "To him a marriage only counts if he gives his blessing. Be glad for that, otherwise he would probably kill you. As it is you aren't important enough to bother with. Father has picked out a husband for neesan and she'd to be married in seven days."

"I don't believe you! Moka would never go along with this!"

"She isn't happy about it," Kokoa confirmed. "But you don't know what father can be like when he gets angry. If she tried to defy him or run away the first thing he would probably do is kill you. She knows that, that's why she asked me to come here. She's doing it to protect you idiot."

"If her father wants to kill me he's welcome to try," Naruto said coldly. "I'm going to get Moka back no matter what."

"Idiot! You don't understand anything!" Kokoa said. "Do you remember when we first met and how you managed to beat me in a fight?"

Naruto nodded.

"Well at the time I remember thinking how you were *almost* as strong as father."

"Good, I've gotten a lot stronger since then."

Kokoa shook her head. "You don't get it. Look, let me explain in a way that even a block head like you will understand. When father would punish me he wouldn't draw on *any* of his powers. He would use nothing but his ordinary strength, and he was *still* stronger than you were. Vampires don't gain their powers through training, they gain them through time. The older a vampire becomes the more powerful he becomes, there have been a few exceptions but they

are damn rare. You know how strong neesan is and she is only seventeen. Our father, Lord Akashiya is over *two thousand* years old! He has powers and strength you could never even imagine. Were he to fight you seriously you wouldn't last thirty seconds. Neesan knows that and that's why she's trying to protect you."

"I don't care how old or powerful he is," Naruto said angrily. "If he tries to take Moka-chan from me I'll kill him. Just tell me where she is."

"No, if you're stupid enough to try and get yourself killed I won't help." Kokoa softened just a bit. "Look, since neesan really loves you I guess you can't be all bad and *maybe* I could have gotten used to you, maybe. But for her sake if not for your own give up the idea of getting her back. If you get killed because of her it will only break her heart. Goodbye Naruto." She was surrounded by black flames and was gone.

Naruto stared at the spot where she'd been. Then he looked to where the ring was still clutched in his fist.

I've got seven days to get her back and stop this. I made her a promise that we would never be apart again. I'd rather die than break that promise and lose her.

He headed downstairs from the roof; he had a lot to do and not much time.

A goodbye and a promise to return

Hinata was coming out of the kitchen to try and find Naruto. He hadn't had any lunch and she wanted to see if he would at least have dinner with her. She wanted to talk to him and let him know that she was worried about Moka too. Though she could not deny being jealous of her, and of the love she inspired in Naruto, Hinata would never hate her. She also just wanted to try and help him if she could. Not only was Moka missing but her father had done *something*, she of course did not know what it was. All she wanted was to support him in whatever small way she could.

As she was heading towards the stairs to try and find him she saw three Narutos come bounding down them. One moved with purpose to where his wedding portrait hung on the wall. Naruto carefully took it down and headed back up the stairs with it. The other two took position at the base of the stairwell.

"Naruto-kun," Hinata called to him. "I've made dinner, would the real you like to eat?"

The clone with the painting under his arm smiled at her, as did the other two. "Ah no thanks Hinata-chan, I'm a little too busy right now. But the real me will want to talk to you later tonight. Until then please don't go upstairs or use your byakugan. I'd rather not have your dad know what I'm up to until later."

There was no anger to it, and no accusation. It was just a simple request that she not spy on him. She still flinched to hear it though. "Ah, can I at least go upstairs to my bedroom?"

The clone she was speaking with shook his head. "Sorry."

Despite the smiles and the kind tone she got the definite sense that if she tried going up those stairs or used a shun shin Naruto would be very unhappy with her. "Naruto-kun is something going on?"

His smile looked amused, but something in it made her want to quiver. "I'll explain tonight Hinata-chan." With that he went up the stairs while the other two casually stood there, trying to pretend they weren't guarding the stairway.

There really wasn't anything for her to do so she went back to the kitchen to have dinner.

She found she had lost her appetite though.

Tayuya entered the library and saw it was a whirlwind of activity. There were about fifty clones running about everywhere gathering things up and bringing them here. A number of those clones were going through the stacks and selecting hundreds of books and bringing them over to one of the tables. Along with regular books there were also photo albums and what looked like every jutsu scroll in the house. Naruto was not only gathering books. A couple clones came in with arms full of women's clothing. One table had a pile of cash just sitting on it, along with all sorts of gold and silver; everything from candlesticks to works of art. If she hadn't known Naruto was the mansion's owner she'd have thought he was a thief robbing the place.

"What's going on?" Tayuya asked out loud.

A Naruto sitting at an empty table staring down at a blank sheet of paper answered her. "I'm leaving tonight, and I won't be back for some time. So I'm taking everything I might want from this place before I go."

She went over to that Naruto assuming he was the original. "That sounds pretty final," she said.

He looked up at her and nodded.

"Let me just guess, the Hokage told you, you couldn't leave under pain of being declared a missing nin. But you're leaving anyway to

go look for Moka."

"Clever girl," he sounded pleased. "You really are very smart Tayuya; I can see how you managed to survive working for Orochimaru all those years."

She grinned just a little. "He's not the only scary person I've had to serve."

Naruto laughed a little. "Fair enough." The laughter drifted away and his eyes met hers. "This will be the last night you serve in this mansion Tayuya."

She suddenly felt a little fear down in the pit of her stomach. Despite his snacking on her and his occasional death threat she had actually enjoyed serving Naruto. Whatever some people believed Naruto *wasn't* insane. Unlike with Orochimaru, she had never gotten the sense he would just suddenly snap and kill her for no reason. He had told her many times that so long as she served him faith fully he would not harm her (at least not beyond making a meal of her.) She had come to trust that. But that didn't mean he didn't still scare the hell out of her, or that he wouldn't kill her if he felt there was a reason to.

"Just what does that mean?" She was careful to mask her fear.

She hid it well, but Naruto could smell the sudden terror coming off her. "Don't worry," he assured her. "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm giving you two choices. I promise that whichever you decide you'll still be safe."

"Well that's good to hear."

"First, if you want you can just go. You've done enough for me that I'm willing to just let you walk away." He pointed to the table loaded with cash and other valuables. "I'll even give you a million ryu as severance pay. But if you decide to leave my employ you'll have to leave the village tonight and become a missing nin."

She grimaced and nodded. Even with the money added in she didn't really like that idea much. If Naruto was going to disappear the leaf nins would come after her full bore to learn anything they could. And if they caught her...

"And what's my second choice?"

He smiled wickedly. "Keep working for me of course. But you won't be a maid anymore; you'll become my spy within the village. You'll leave here tonight, afraid for your life. Go to one of the clans you've been spying for and beg them for sanctuary. Tell them you think I've gone insane; believe me, after tonight no one will think you're lying."

She looked at him questioningly. "It sounds to me like you have more in mind than just leaving."

"Some things you don't need to know. But I will tell you that you're going to lose all your possessions. When you go you won't have anything but the clothes on your back."

"But what about all my money?!"

"I think it would look a little suspicious if you showed up holding a shoebox full of cash."

"So basically you want me to sacrifice everything I have so I can risk my life spying for you?"

"Yeah."

"You're not fucking asking for much are you?"

"Oh I know I'm asking a lot, but if you're loyal to me I'll reward you. I'll give you something more precious than just money."

"What have you got in mind?" She asked warily.

He looked at her with serious eyes. "How would you like to be immortal?"

Hinata was sitting down at the kitchen table. It was late, getting on towards midnight when he had finally come down to talk to her. He had sat her down and proceeded to make her a very strange offer.

She shook her head a bit. "I don't understand Naruto-kun."

"It's really not that complex Hinata-chan," Naruto said patiently. "If you want you can have me as a real husband. I'll share your bed and we can have a family together. I'll try to be good to you and make you happy. But if you agree we'll have to go somewhere far from the elemental lands and disappear. We can never return or have any sort of contact with the village or your family. I will lose all my abilities and my chakra and be just an ordinary man, but I'll be yours. What do you say?"

"Naruto-kun, to *really* be your wife and have a family with you is what I've dreamed of. But... but you're asking me to abandon my village and my family."

"I am asking you to make a choice Hinata-chan. You're the one who came to me and talked about love and doing *anything* for me." He said quietly. "If you truly love me that much then I'm willing to give you what you want. All you have to do is say yes."

"I... I want to... b... but I can't!" She looked at him pleadingly. "Naruto-kun I love you! But what you're asking me to do is discard everything else that matters to me. I can't do that!"

"I see," he said calmly. "So in the end you care more for your father and for Konoha than you do for me."

"Naruto-kun it's not like that!"

"No Hinata, it's exactly like that. I don't really blame you though. I've never had a father or a real home so I can't judge. But the fact is I'm not what's most important to you."

"Naruto-kun..."

"Do you know why I love Moka as much as I do?"

"Wh... why?" She asked in a small voice.

"Because she would do anything for me. Fight or kill or die, and she would do it without a second's hesitation. A love like that between a man and a woman is rare, and it's worth everything." He stared at her and she flinched back from him. "Real love requires a lot more than words or a few acts. It demands courage. It demands that everything else be cast aside for its sake. You say you love me Hinata-chan, and yet you won't even stand up to your own father for me."

She looked down ashamed. "Naruto-kun you don't understand what... what it's like. Know... knowing your own father sees you as a... a dis... disappointment."

"You've got me there Hinata-chan, but then do you know what it's like growing up hated and despised? Don't try and make me feel sorry for you, you have no idea what a hard life really is."

She looked back up at him with tears in her eyes. "Naruto-kun I really do love you!"

Looking at her soft face he felt sorry for her. She wasn't a bad person; maybe if things had been different he really could have loved her. But she just didn't have the strength that real love required. Maybe she'd never had it. Maybe Hiashi had beaten it out of her long ago.

"I know you love me Hinata, and for that I will always protect you. But I'm afraid that it's not enough." He took out a sealed note and handed it to her. "Please give that to your father when you see him. I'm afraid you have to leave now."

"Leave? Wha... what do you mean?"

He took a deep breath. "I want you to leave here and never return. Consider this a divorce; you are no longer my wife."

He got up and walked away without looking back, not even as he heard her crying his name.

Hinata and Tayuya had left. Except for his clones he was now all alone. He was dressed in his black ninja clothing with several scrolls containing everything he was taking with him safely tucked away. He knew his home was being watched by the ANBU. He could just imagine their panic since Hinata and Tayuya had both just fled his home. He was on the roof again taking a long last look at the village that he should have grown up loving. He was about to begin when he felt someone approaching. *Heh, well this is perfect.*

Jiraiya landed on the roof near him looking worried. "Naruto what the hell are you doing?"

"Is that any way to say hello godfather?"

"Listen kid..."

"DON'T CALL ME KID YOU PERVERTED FUCK!" Naruto screamed at him. "I haven't been a kid in a long time and you don't get to be familiar after you abandoned me."

Jiraiya took a couple steps back; Naruto wasn't hiding his feelings anymore. The killer intent was coming off him so strongly he was afraid Naruto was really going to attack him. "Naruto please calm down!"

Naruto looked at him, his face ablaze with hate and with contempt. "Everything you've done has been because of orders right? You putting the seal on me, becoming my sensei, training me, not training me, *all* of it was just following orders right?"

"No! Not all of it! Naruto whether you believe it or not I care about you and I want to help you!"

"Liar! Don't tell me any of your fucking lies. If you actually gave a damn about me you would have protected me when I needed you! You would have kept your promise to my father and been my guardian! But instead you ran away. And you only came back when the Hokage *ordered* you to."

His words were like kunai stabbing him in the chest. *He really does hate me. Oh Minato, forgive me for the way I've failed you.* "You're right Naruto," Jiraiya felt his voice cracking. "I made a promise to your father and I broke it. I told myself I would come back eventually to keep it, but somehow I never did. Not before the Hokage sent me to you. I am truly sorry. But you need to know it was *never* because I hated you! It was because I was afraid; I didn't know anything about being a father. I didn't want the responsibility and so I ran, I took mission after mission that would keep me from the village. And for that Naruto I... I am truly sorry. And I'll do anything I can for the rest of my life to make it up to you."

Naruto stared at him and Jiraiya felt the killer intent actually get stronger.

"Do you know how despicable you are?" Naruto muttered. "You didn't hate me like the others? You left me all alone to be tortured because you were **afraid** ? The great Jiraiya, the Toad Sage the Sannin, scared off by a little boy. Why don't you put **that** in one of your fucking books?"

That was when his body began transforming. The red chakra poured out and surrounded him.

"Naruto! What are you doing?!" As Jiraiya watched Naruto's scars deepened and thickened. His hands became claws and his eyes became red and slitted. On his hands and neck red fur began to sprout and thicken. His nose and mouth stretched out as his face became much more animalistic. Jiraiya had seen Naruto's half

kitsune form often, but the changes had never been this pronounced. He looked more like some monster than he did a human.

But most frightening were the six tails that had now formed around him. After being with Naruto so long he understood this meant he would be able to draw **seven** when he was in his vampiric form.

Jiraiya took a couple more steps back without even realizing it. "Naruto have you gone insane?! The Hokage will have you killed now!"

"Insane?" Naruto's voice was deep and feral and not at all familiar. "I was insane to come back to this place. I should have just hidden until the time was right. But right now I don't think I've ever been more sane in my life. I know what matters and what doesn't and I know just what to do." With his claws he ran through a series of hand signs. " **Kage Bushin no Jutsu.**"

Jiraiya felt his hair stand on end as the air rippled with chakra and was filled with smoke. When the smoke cleared the roof and the grounds below were packed with kage bushins, all looking monstrous and smiling. As one, all of them (including the original) turned their faces to the night sky and *howled*. Jiraiya froze, feeling like a rabbit suddenly surrounded by a pack of wolves.

The instant the howl was complete they all began to leap away heading out of the estates.

"How... how many..." The original was still there staring at him.

"Four thousand," Naruto answered. "I could have made more, but that should be enough."

"Enough?" Jiraiya felt himself snapping out of his fear and regaining his composure. "Enough for what?"

Almost immediately they heard screams and explosions and the sounds of battle.

"Enough to give everyone a proper goodbye." Naruto told him.
"They're going to burn and kill to their... no, to **my** heart's content. And they'll be killing ninja too, not just villagers, I'll share my affections with everyone equally."

"Naruto, stop this!"

Naruto smiled with a mouth that was all fangs. "The only way to stop me is to kill me, but you already know that don't you godfather?"

Jiraiya stared at him open mouthed. "Naruto don't make me do this."

Naruto looked out to parts of the village that were already on fire.
"They won't be able to destroy the whole village of course; shadow clones can only do so much after all. But I expect they can probably burn down a quarter or so before they're stopped. And there'll be piles and piles of bones of course."

"Naruto..." Jiraiya was weeping as he formed the sign. "Forgive me."

Naruto felt a twinge on his chest and laughed. "So you finally did something without a direct order, I'm proud of you godfather."

Jiraiya stared. "What?"

Naruto seemed to disappear and in the next second Jiraiya felt a sledgehammer connect with his jaw as he was sent flying off the rooftop.

His eyes slowly opened. He could taste blood in his mouth and he knew from the horrible pain that his jaw was broken. Surprisingly though he didn't seem hurt anywhere else. As his opened they were almost blinded by an intense light. When they were finally able to focus he could see that the Namikaze mansion was on fire.

"Beautiful isn't it?" A tranquil voice spoke. "I really do love fire; it's pure energy and filled with life as well as destruction. Looking at the

flames always gives me a sense of peace."

He was still surrounded by red chakra, but there was no killer intent now. Naruto was looking down at him and seemed totally calm and rational even if he looked like a beast.

"Just so you know, I don't blame you for trying to kill me just now. You're a leaf nin after all, and I'm your enemy. Here, I never really wanted this thing." He tossed him the hitai-ite that Jiraiya had given him upon passing the Genin exam.

Jiraiya tried to talk, but it wasn't possible with a broken jaw. Instead he pointed to Naruto's chest.

"Ah," he said after a moment. "Let me guess, you want to know why you weren't able to kill me with your hand sign?"

Jiraiya nodded.

"That's my secret, but let's just say you're not the only seal master out there." Naruto looked at him calm and at ease. "You saved my life and you tried to kill me, so that's balanced out. I could go ahead and kill you for abandoning me, but I think I'd rather have you live for now. I want you to see the blackened ruins and look at the piles of dead, and I want you to suffer. I want you to wonder what would have happened if you had just kept that promise. Goodbye godfather, we *will* meet again."

And as Jiraiya watched Naruto was surrounded by black fire and then gone. He was left alone to witness the ancient home of the Namikaze ablaze and crumbling.

The next morning the Hokage sat in his office listening to report after report concerning the damage and loss of life from the previous night. Over two hundred ninja had died in the fighting along with more than ten thousand civilians. Many more were wounded and had overwhelmed Konoha hospital and the medic corps. It was a

disaster greater than any the village had known since the sneak attack that had started the last war.

Despite the grave situation Hiashi kept a calm demeanor that was expected of the Hokage. The people looked to him for reassurance and his was duty to face things with calm certainty so as to give others peace of mind. For that reason he had destroyed the note his daughter had given him as soon as he'd read it. He would never tell anyone the message that Naruto had sent to him. The note had read:

I'll come back on my birthday to finish it.

Lord Akashiya

Four Months Ago

They were in the middle of a swamp. After seven long months of chasing after Kabuto and his master they'd come to River country and been forced to camp right in the middle of a steamy bug infested swamp. As was his habit Naruto had agreed to take the last watch as his fellow ninja slept. Actually he had offered to handle all the watches using his shadow clones. That would have actually allowed everyone to get a full night's sleep. Jiraiya had been o.k. with the idea, but of course Sasuke had insisted they each pull a watch. It was almost as if Sasuke didn't trust him. So instead each of them drew a watch covering a third of the night. (Sasuke had also insisted that since Moka wasn't a leaf nin that she could not be trusted with guarding the camp.) So as was the norm Sasuke had taken the first shift, Jiraiya the second, and Naruto and Moka had gotten up to take the last. Moka always insisted on getting up when he did.

So the two of them wound up sitting up in a tree watching the sky beginning to lighten. Naruto slapped his neck as yet another mosquito took a bite out of him.

"It seems I am not the only one who finds your blood delicious," Moka said, sounding amused.

Naruto looked over to his incredibly beautiful wife. Her clothes were stained with mud and sweat and the day was likely to be as boring and unproductive as their last few had been. Recently they'd been searching through the bogs and marshes looking for a criminal hideout they *thought* was out here. So far it had proven one huge waste of time.

"Moka-chan," Naruto spoke quietly. "Are you happy?"

His wife lifted a curious eyebrow. "Happy with what specifically?"

"With this," he waved at the camp behind them. "With spending all our time trekking half way around the continent following every crazy rumor we hear. With being forced to hang out with the mega perv and Mr. Personality. With being dirty and sweaty and hot and cold all the time. Are you happy being stuck with this life?"

She looked at him with understanding and a slight grin. "I think what you really mean to say is, 'Am I happy being with you even though you seem to be inflicting this hardship on me?'"

He grimaced a bit. "Well I wouldn't have put it like that, but..."

She cut him off with a light kiss on his lips. "My beloved, you really are an idiot some times," she said teasingly. "I never asked for life to be easy or comfortable. All I asked was that my life be spent with you. So long as we are together I am happy."

He smiled and let out a relieved sigh.

"And besides," she leaned over and playfully ran her tongue over his ear. "The sex makes up for everything else."

The two of them laughed so hard they wound up waking Jiraiya and Sasuke.

Present Day

She was in her old room. It had been kept exactly as it had been the day she'd left to find her mother. The furniture was all hand carved cherry wood, each piece unique and exquisite. The sheets on her bed were satin. In her closet were gowns made of silk (all of them of course sized for when she'd been a child.) Running along the far wall were dolls, each one hand crafted of porcelain or ivory. Their eyes were all made from cut gems, rubies, emeralds, or sapphires. She could open the door to her room and call out and servants would come running to fulfill her every whim. Just as when she'd been growing up she was surrounded by wealth and luxury.

She hated it.

She wanted to escape. She wanted to run away to the one person she truly loved, and the one person who truly loved her. She could leave if she wanted to. With a simple teleportation she could be with her Naruto again. She could be kissing him, holding him, loving him. She could be happy in his arms again.

But only until her father came. If she left without permission he *would* find her. She understood the vast gulf between her strength and his. There was no way for her to mask her presence from him. She could not keep him from finding her. Worse, if Naruto tried to intervene, and she knew he would, father would think nothing of killing him.

She glanced down at her left hand where her wedding ring had been. Growing up she had been surrounded by gold cast into every shape and sort. She had a certain fondness for it, mostly for its decorative rather than its monetary value. But no piece of gold had ever been as precious to her as that plain ring. Naruto had spent two million ryo on their wedding ceremony and then just walked into a shop and purchased the first pair of rings he'd seen. Somehow that had just endeared him to her even more.

There was a sharp rap on the door that brought her out of her melancholy thoughts.

"Come in," Moka said.

The door swung open and Karua strode in. She had on a shiny blue and cream colored gown today along with her usual tiara and other jewels. She was far more excited about the upcoming wedding than Moka was. To Karua it meant a chance to play dress up in public and party. She sent Moka a dazzling smile. "What's wrong imouto? Aren't you eager about the big day?"

"No," Moka said flatly.

"But why not?" Karua said excitedly. She began to dance around the room. "There'll be music and dancing and beautiful people dressed in beautiful clothes." She looked at her sister and giggled. "And then you'll get to do naaaaughty things with your new husband!"

Moka gave her a hard look. "If he even tries anything I will rip arms out, and maybe something else too."

Karua laughed and began to dance about her. "Oooh, my little sister is in a bad mood! Cheer up little sister, just think of your wedding as an excuse to party."

"Did you want something Karua?"

She stopped dancing and gave her little sister an impish grin. "Daddy wants to talk to you."

As she walked along the empty halls her footsteps echoed, click, clack, click, clack. The castle was huge, it was twice the size of the Namikaze mansion, and it took time just to get from one part of it to another. And she was not eager to speak to father again.

As she slowly walked she came across one of the servants. Dressed in the fancy black and grey uniform they all wore the servant quickly stepped aside and bowed to her. His sickly green skin looking paler than most of its ilk. His beady black eyes watched her nervously as she strode past without deeming to notice him. As soon as she had passed he scurried off to complete whatever task he'd been set. As soon as he was gone Moka's mouth twisted in distaste. Goblins made fine servants once they understood who the master was, they were obedient and tireless. But their scents were rank, they were scavengers by nature and they seemed to carry an underlying odor of rot. They were just one more of the ugly truths of this place.

Eventually she came to the audience chamber that was at the very heart of the castle. There before her stood a set of double iron doors ten feet tall. Carved into them was the Akashiya family crest. In it

was the image of a king sitting upon his throne while someone kneeled before him pressing head to floor in submission. Beneath the image was the family motto; *Know thy Place*. They were words, and a state of mind, that she knew quite well. She pushed open the heavy iron doors with ease.

"You sent for me father?" She called out.

"Come in Moka," his firm voice answered.

She closed the doors and entered. This was the audience chamber where her father liked to meet and impress his visitors. It was massive, being fifty yard across and having a domed ceiling fifty yards high. The ceiling was covered in a mosaic that depicted moments from her father's life. He liked to see himself as a warrior and a powerful ruler. There was a scene of him slaying a black dragon with a huge sword. There was one of him defeating and killing half a dozen rival vampires. One of his standing all alone on a field covered with human corpses, all of them wearing armor. There was a scene of his sitting on a gold throne while all sorts of monsters knelt before him. All along the far walls were tapestries depicting more scenes from her father's long and glorious life. There were weapons too, most of them forged of steel or iron. One was a great sword that shined with a silvery light, that one was made of mythril. This entire room was designed to overawe and impress visitors, and the best example of that was the chair in the very middle of the room. It was a throne set on a five foot high stepped dais made of pure gold. There was more gold in that chair than many nations had in their treasuries. Father had once told her, in one of their rare conversations, that it was a hard and uncomfortable seat. But that it was made to be seen not to be enjoyed.

The fact that her father was sitting on it now was a bad sign. It meant this would be a formal audience. Suppressing her urge to sigh she went before the throne and bowed low to him. At least she was spared having to spend the audience on her knees. As she stood before him she was forced to crane her neck a bit to look him in the eye. Father had not changed at all in the time she had been away.

The same short cropped silver hair, the same blood red eyes, the same wrinkles that extended from the corners of his eyes and lips. Were he a human he would be considered a very handsome man in his 40's. He had on the same clothing he had always favored, a traditional looking black suit with a flowing black cape. Around his neck he wore a gold rosario with a blue diamond as its center piece.

He was looking down at her with a cautious look in his eyes, as though considering what he was going to say. "It is good to see you daughter; you are calmer than the last time we spoke."

She slowly nodded. "Please forgive my previous behavior father. I was upset with the situation."

He lifted a single thin eyebrow. "And now you are not?"

"I have accepted the circumstances for what they are."

"There is no need to be so glum Moka. Like you Kento is a true born vampire, he should make you a fitting husband."

"He is a smirking empty headed fool," Moka said coldly.

Her father grinned. "Perhaps, but I did not choose him for his wit. He is very strong. Together I expect you will have some powerful children."

"Is that all that matters to you father? Does my happiness mean nothing to you?"

"I have never been one to deny anyone pleasure Moka. You are quite free to seek whatever happiness you can, but I expect you to fulfill your duty first."

"And what duty is that? To breed with a man I know I will never love?"

"Love?" He said with distaste. "You begin to sound like your mother." He shook his head

wearily. "When I allowed you to see your mother and then allowed you to play about in the human world it was in the hopes you would see the truth for yourself."

"And what truth is that father?"

"That for vampires the idea of love is a dangerous weakness. You have seen the world of humans as well as the world of the youkai. The humans no longer believe we exist and the youkai all fear and hate us. There is no place for vampires in either realm. To survive we must make a place for ourselves through our strength. For us love is a dangerous illusion. *Especially* love for the lower creatures." He gave her a knowing look. "Play with them if you must, but do not delude yourself into thinking *that* is love."

"I know what love is father," she said trying to keep her anger in check. "Though of course I had to leave this cold and heartless place to learn. Love, real love, is no weakness; on the contrary it is the greatest possible strength."

"Is that a fact?" He said with a soft tone. Before her eyes he vanished. In the next instant she felt his iron hand tight around her throat. He yanked her up off the floor and into the air, holding her easily with his outstretched arm. She fought to break his grip but her struggles had no effect. "Then since you have love and I do not doesn't that imply that you should be stronger than me? Please show me this great strength."

She scratched and punched but his hand still squeezed her neck, she was like a kitten trying to fight a wolf.

Just as she was about to pass out he let go and she collapsed to the stone floor. "I have lived two millennia and sired hundreds of children on hundreds of women. Do you think there is anything special in what you did Moka? Do you really imagine that playing house with some human was somehow unique? I walked in the human world for a thousand years. Back in the ancient days when the humans knew us and feared us. I have lost track of how many wives and lovers I

have taken. And I will even confess that in my younger days I was foolish enough to believe I actually loved some of them. But no matter how I felt it always ended the same, I was always alone. Even when I turned them."

She looked up at him in surprise. "You made second born vampires? But you always said it was a mistake to turn humans into vampires."

"And did you ever wonder how I gained that opinion?" He asked coldly. "Humans who become second born remain lower creatures in their ways of thinking no matter what bodies they are given. They are shallow and selfish and faithless. They can *never* be our equals, they are fit only to be servants and play things."

"You're wrong father," she said as she stood up. "What I've seen is that it's not the race that matters, but only what is in a person's heart."

"How naïve," he said. "And how arrogant as well, you who are all of seventeen think to preach to me? One of the five elders?" He shook his head. "Know your place Moka. If you wish to take some human lovers you can. I would not deny you your pleasures and I know Kento will have an open mind, *provided* you fulfill your wifely duties."

She grimaced. "I am willing to do most of the things expected of a wife, but..."

"You will do them *all* Moka; you will be a proper wife in all ways. Or perhaps I will find this human you love so much, this Naruto, and punish him for your obstinacy. Is that what you want?"

He would do it; she had no doubts at all. She believed in Naruto's strength, but knew it would simply not be a match for her father's. "No father," she lowered her head obediently. "I will do what you expect of me."

Lord Akashiya nodded. "You see, your love is a weakness. But come daughter, let's not fight. Kento is eager to look on you again. Let us

all have dinner together and discuss plans for the wedding."

Though it broke her heart she nodded. To protect her beloved she was ready to do anything... even lose him.

The students were heading to class when black flames appeared in front of them. When the flames disappeared a blonde haired man dressed in black was standing there. Spotting them he flashed them a quick smile.

"Excuse me; do you know if the Headmaster is on campus?" Seeing a couple of them nod their heads was all the confirmation he needed. He headed off eager to speak to the headmaster and see what he might know.

Read all signs

"You know this isn't what I had in mind," Naruto said. He was currently trapped in a sphere of energy with the Headmaster looking on. On the floor around him were six unconscious men in black uniforms.

"Well you did attack my guards," the Headmaster pointed out.

"I didn't kill them, and anyway they attacked me first."

"After you broke into my home."

"I *walked* in through the front door. I'm in a rush; I'm not going to waste time asking for a meeting. All I want is to talk, now let me go or I am going to get really pissed off."

The Headmaster let out a weary sigh. "You should learn to be more polite with people Naruto, your results might improve."

The sphere around him vanished. "Yeah, well my experience is that politeness works a whole lot better when you're someone who can tear a castle down. Listen Headmaster, I need some information."

"Yes, I believe this is what you have come for." The man in the white robes held out a manila folder to him.

Naruto took it from him and opened it. It was Moka's school file. He looked at the Headmaster suspiciously. "How did you know?"

"I know a great many things Naruto." He declined to say anything more.

"Whatever," he muttered. Naruto looked back at the file. "There's nothing in here but her transcripts. There's no home address or anything about her family."

"That information was never provided and we do not require it for admittance." Naruto looked at him. "And before you ask it I will not assist you in finding her family's location."

"Why not?" Naruto demanded. "All I am trying to do is rescue my wife."

"I have my reasons Naruto," the Headmaster said. "The goal of this academy is to engender peace and coexistence between youkai and human. Wherever possible we try to avoid conflict. Were I to give you the information you seek the consequences could be dire."

"If by that you mean I might do some killing you're probably right." Naruto gave the man a hard look. "You know where her family's home is don't you?"

"Perhaps," the Headmaster admitted. "But I have no intention of telling you." He looked at Naruto calmly with his glowing eyes. "Do you intend to threaten me now?"

Looking at the man he carefully thought it over. "No," he said slowly. "I still have six days to find her and I have other possibilities in mind. I'd rather not make you my enemy if I can avoid it." He slowly smiled. "If you won't tell me what I need to know would you be willing to give me help in a different form?"

"That would depend, what is it you want?"

Naruto told him.

The Headmaster shook his head slightly. "You don't ask for much do you?" He said unbelieving.

"I know I'm asking for a lot, but look at it this way. I **am** going to find Moka and get her back no matter what. If you were to help me it might keep the body count down."

The headmaster paused as he thought over Naruto's request. "I will give you what you ask for, but I want something in return."

"Name it," Naruto said instantly.

"I intend to retire in the next few years; I would like you to be my successor."

"What?" Naruto gawked at him. "You've got to be kidding me."

"Not at all," the Headmaster replied calmly. "Whoever replaces me will have to be a being of great power in order to maintain the order and peace of this school. The raw power within you definitely makes you a candidate. Also, despite your penchant for violence. I have kept a careful eye on you. Your deep concern not only for Moka but for your other classmates leads me to believe you might handle the responsibility of being Headmaster well. Even though I expelled you I think you would do well. What say you?"

Naruto stared at him. "You're actually serious."

"Yes, I usually am."

Naruto grinned. "If you trust me to succeed you how about you trust me with Moka's location as well?"

The Headmaster shook his head. "I am resolved *not* to hasten this confrontation."

"All right... how about you also give me the use of one of the buses?"

The Headmaster paused, but finally nodded. "Agreed." He held out his hand.

Though the idea of his running a school for monsters struck him as bizarre Naruto took the hand and shook it. "It's a deal."

"You've been here before, so you know how things work." The bus driver said.

Naruto nodded. "Yeah, I know."

There was a third person on the bus and he looked over at Naruto with a sour expression. "Once again Naruto-sama, may I say this is not a wise course of action. Those people are not to be trusted."

Naruto looked over to the other man with a slight grin. "Not at all like you, huh Kuyou?"

"My loyalty to Lord Kyuubi is absolute," the youkai kitsune said stiffly.

"Well that's nice, so just as long as he is stuck inside my guts I guess you're loyal to me, right?"

"Of course," Kuyou replied. "You have my complete faith and devotion." *Right up until the moment you reach the nine tail state and the Great Lord is able to devour you.*

"I can't tell you how comforting that is to hear," Naruto said with a straight face.

"Again, let me beg you to not turn to these people for help. Give me and my fellow kitsune a little time and we will find what you are looking for."

"I only have a little time," Naruto said. "I can't afford to just wait around. I was hoping that you would know where the vampire secret world was located."

"As I have already explained Naruto-sama, there is no secret vampire world. They are solitary creatures and very proud. They are not the sort to make the sacrifices necessary to build a real community. The only thing they respect is power; they maintain what associations they have only out of fear of their five elders."

"Five elders?" Naruto asked.

"Vampires are too proud to have a single king or absolute ruler. Instead the five oldest and most powerful among them share power in a sort of ruling council. They don't actually come together very often, even their leader are very independent minded. But when they do meet their laws and decrees are absolute."

"If they don't have their own secret world, then where do they live?"

"Anywhere and everywhere," Kuyou shrugged. "You will find them scattered throughout most of the hidden youkai worlds. There are vampire strongholds in the worlds of goblins, kobolds, orcs, trolls, and many others. They mostly keep to themselves and avoid contact with the locals. Usually the local population is not too keen on having them around either and is just as eager to avoid contact. But, by far and away most vampires live in the human world, carefully disguising themselves to avoid notice. Moka's family could be located anywhere."

Naruto grinned. "So are there any in the world of youkai kitsunes?"

"No," Kuyou said smugly. "The Great Lord would never tolerate that."

The bus exited the long tunnel and emerged on a high plateau. "We're here," the bus driver called out. He opened the door and his two riders shuffled forward. "Please watch your step as you exit. I will be parked here when you are ready to go."

Naruto and Kuyou were both in human forms with Naruto dressed in his ninja outfit and Kuyou wearing his Police Committee uniform. When Naruto stepped out onto the ground nothing of note happened. When Kuyou did so his body was consumed in white light. He transformed into his final form. He was a few inches taller with a pair of fox ears and four fiery tails.

The bus was parked right on the outskirts of Azkarra. There was a large sign right there.

LET NO LIE BE SPOKEN. LET NO DECEPTION STAND. LET YOUR WISH BE FULFILLED. LET THE PRICE BE PAID.

"Have you ever been to the world of the Djin before?" Naruto asked.

"Of course not," Kuyou said. "What use would I have for such a pack of thieves?" He walked past the sign without even looking at it.

"So far as I can tell they keep all their bargains," Naruto pointed out.

"You can steal without breaking a promise or telling a lie. I will not deny they are skilled thieves."

"Well, whatever you may think the Djin have their uses." They were heading into the crowded city. As they did so most of the people walking the streets gave them a wide berth. Their attention drawn not to the human but to the fire tailed kitsune. "As does their world and its... unique properties." He smiled at Kuyou. "Kuyou, would you tell me what you really think of me?"

The yuokai kitsune grinned and was going to tell Naruto just how much he admired and respected him. "I think you are a wretched thief who somehow stole the Great Lord's power. I would like nothing better than to cut out your living heart and eat it as you watched." A look of pure horror covered Kuyou's face. "That was not what I meant to say!"

"Obviously," Naruto replied. "And what is your ultimate plan for getting rid of me and freeing your precious Kyuubi?"

There is no such plan; I wish only to serve you. That was what he intended to say. "The plan is that when you achieve the nine tail state you will have to transform into a full youkai kitsune in order to withstand the massive chakra that will flow into your body. At that point the Great Lord Kyuubi will fully emerge and you will be utterly consumed. You will only exist as an annoying memory of the Great Lord's."

"I see," Naruto said. "And what would you and the other youkai kitsune do if after the final transformation I was the one still around and Kyuubi was gone for good?"

"We would have no choice but to accept you as our Lord and ruler. You would rule over us as the Great Lord Naruto. But that could never happen; the Great Lord Kyuubi will extinguish you like a candle flame." Kuyou bit down his teeth. "What are you doing to me?!" He glowered at Naruto.

"Nothing," Naruto answered truthfully. "Nothing but asking questions. I have just one more. When I gain the nine tails will the youkai kitsune really accept me or will they try and assassinate me to have me replaced?"

"We do not kill our own," Kuyou said. "And to rebel against our lord would be an unthinkable crime. If you wield the nine tails then you are the one and only Great Lord and all kitsune shall serve you... forever."

Naruto smiled. "I like the sound of that."

Kuyou stared down at him as he continued to follow. Naruto knew exactly where he wanted to go it seemed. "What do you intend to do to me? Are you going to kill me?"

"No," Naruto answered. "I was always sure you planned to betray me. I just never knew how. I don't intend to punish you in any way."

"But why? When you now know what will happen when you achieve the final state."

Naruto looked at him over his shoulder and gave him a very cold smile. "Let me tell you something you arrogant bastard. I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to get Moka back, I'm going to get revenge on the people who wronged me, and then I'm going to live a long and happy life with Moka-chan and our kids. That's what my future holds, and I won't let anyone or anything keep it from happening. That

includes Moka's dad, you, Kyuubi, all of Konoha, and Kami too. **Nothing** is keeping me from being with her."

Kuyou stared back at him, a little impressed by his passion and determination to be with his mate. Still...

"Whatever you believe the Great Lord will devour you when the time comes."

Naruto turned his head back to the front. "I know that's what you truly believe, but that doesn't make it so."

"The same applies to what you believe." Kuyou said haughtily.

"Well then... there's really not a problem is there?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, either I'm right or you are. I am at seven tails now. I should get to nine before too much longer. When the time comes we'll find out who has it right. In the meantime you'll continue to obey me, correct?"

"Yes," Kuyou said with a discontented sigh.

Melzar recognized him immediately and made a huge production of welcoming him to his shop.

"Thanks, but I'm a little pressed for time. Can we get down to business?"

The dijin merchant smiled and nodded. "Of course, how may I help you?"

"You served Moka's father right? That is how Moka knew you, right?"

"Yes," Melzar said proudly. "I am indeed one of Lord Akashiya's acquaintances, and dare I say, compatriot."

"Whatever, I need to know where Moka's family home is."

Melzar hesitated; he had the information and was eager to make a profit, but his survival instincts told him to be wary. "Why would you have to come for me for this information? Why not simply ask Moka?"

"Moka has been kidnapped by her family. It seems her father means to marry her off against her will." Naruto knew he couldn't lie so did not see any point in trying to disguise his purpose. "I plan to go there and get Moka-chan back."

"Get her back?" The blue skinned merchant said nervously. "You don't mean to try and take her back by force do you?"

"If I have to," Naruto answered. "I'll give her father a chance to hand her over to me peacefully. But if he doesn't I'll do whatever I have to."

Melzar looked at him. "Young man, I would like to continue to do business with you in the future." He spoke slowly and seriously. "Therefore, let me give you some free advice."

"Free?" Kuyou sounded disbelieving. "When has a dijin ever given something for free?"

Melzar grinned slightly. "Whenever *not* doing so would cost more. Lord Akashiya, who you are planning to challenge, is one of the five vampire elders. His power is greater than that of any being below a demon lord or shinigami."

Naruto smiled. "Well then, it's a good thing I happen to have the power of the demon lord Kyuubi inside of me."

"Naruto-sama," Kuyou said. "You have access to only a *fraction* of the Great Lord's power. Even with seven tails you would be no match for a vampire elder."

Melzar nodded. "Listen to your friend. Were you to challenge Lord Akashiya your death would be the only possible outcome. And far worse, it might cause my death were he to learn I had any part in aiding you."

"Whatever happens I won't mention your name, I promise." Naruto said. "And I'm ready to pay any price you want for the information."

Melzar sighed regretfully. "Under different circumstances those words would be sweet music to my ears. But I am afraid the risk is too great. One cannot enjoy a profit if the cost is one's own life."

Naruto glared at him and sent some killer intent his way. "Listen you little maggot, sell me the information or I will rip you apart."

"Naruto-sama it's not wise to threaten violence here," Kuyou warned. "The dijin have their own way of dealing with violent customers."

"What are they going to do? Arrest me? Beat me up?"

Melzar let out a regretful sigh. "I am truly sorry to do this; I would have liked to have worked with you in the future." The dijin pointed a single finger at him. "You are banned."

Naruto suddenly found himself standing at the spot where he had originally arrived. The bus driver was standing outside his bus enjoying a cigar.

"What the hell?!" realizing he had been teleported away he headed right back toward Azkara determined to ring the little merchant's throat until he answered.

The moment he passed the sign he found himself right back at the same spot next to the bus. Growling he worked a shunshin, only to find it would only move him a few feet to right in front of the sign.

"Don't bother," the bus driver called out. "It looks like you've been banned. Congratulations, it's next to impossible to actually get yourself banned but I guess you managed it somehow."

"What do I do? I need to get back in there."

The bus driver shook his head. "You can't do anything; once you're banned it's permanent. You'll just have to depend on Kuyou to get whatever you came here for."

Kuyou did not return until an hour later. When he did he explained to an irate Naruto just why he had taken so long.

"I knew you would still want the information so I decided to go to different dijin and see if any of them would be willing to bargain with me." Kuyou said. "I visited ten different shops, and they all seemed to know what I wanted before I even opened my mouth. They all gave me the same answer; none of them will sell you the information for any price."

Naruto wanted to call Kuyou a liar but knew what he'd said had to be the truth.

"Fuck!" Naruto shouted. "Fine then! We'll get the information somewhere else!" He turned and headed back to the bus.

"Where?" Kuyou asked.

"You said there are vampires scattered through all the youkai worlds and the human world as well right?"

"True."

"Well then, we'll just go straight to the source and talk to some vampires." Naruto smiled evilly. "I'm sure I can persuade at least one of them to tell me what I need to know."

As he climbed back onto the bus the driver looked at him. "Back to the academy?"

"No," Naruto answered. "We'll be going to the human world, I'm going hunting."

The vampire who knows

He was running for his life. Through the woods, beneath the moon's light he ran. He didn't know where they had come from or who they were, he only knew he had to get away. He didn't have a destination in mind. He was just running as fast as he could away from *them* .

He came into a clearing in the wood. Without warning they leapt out of the trees, dozens of them. Men dressed in black, with their faces and heads covered. They were human, they had to be human, he could tell by their scents. But they were faster and stronger than any ordinary humans could possibly be. They held knives in their hands but made no effort to attack him. Instead they surrounded him as more and more of them poured into the clearing.

He looked all around desperate for a way past them. "Do you know who I am?" He shouted at them. "Do you know what I am humans?" He stared at them with his red eyes and sent out killer intent. That was usually more than enough to send humans running away in terror. But these men didn't even seem to notice.

One of them answered him, sounding anything but impressed. "Your name is Boris, and you're a weakling little vampire. You may scare the locals in this corner of Hungary, but you're not much of a monster."

He let loose a blood thirsty howl and rushed forward to attack. He caught the nearest one with an open handed strike, using his long nails to slice into his flesh. But rather than being rewarded with the sight of blood his enemy just disappeared with a puff of smoke.

"What foul sorcery is this?!" He shouted.

They did not bother to answer and so he rushed forward to attack again. He struck a couple more and these too disappeared in puffs of smoke. Despite having weapons they made no attempt to attack

him. Rather they seemed satisfied just to keep him surrounded and cut off.

"Enough of this!" He heard an angry voice come from behind. He also felt a powerful demonic aura, much stronger than his. He turned to see a figure rushing at him, dressed in the same black clothing and with his face covered. But this one wasn't human, he was surrounded by a demonic aura so powerful aura it was visible. And he could see the man's eyes, which were not covered by the mask, they were red and slitted. That was all Boris had time to notice before a fist smashed into his face and sent him crashing into a tree and through it.

When Boris woke up he found himself chained to a tree in the clearing. The small army of black clad humans that had chased him from his castle were all gone. But the one who had the demonic aura was standing over him. This one wasn't human. If the eyes and aura were not enough to prove that he could smell fox on him.

"Who are you? Why have you attacked me?"

"Never fucking mind who I am," the man told him coldly. "As for why I attacked you, I need information. Now we can do this the hard way or the easy way.' He calmly removed a canteen from his belt and unscrewed it.

Boris's eyes were drawn to the canteen. "What is that?" Despite not wanting to he ended up sounding fearful.

The man chuckled. "This?" He gave the canteen a bit of a shake and some water sloshed out. "Oh nothing, just some nice pure spring water, are you thirsty?"

He held the canteen out to him and Boris instinctively pressed himself against the tree trying to avoid it. "No! Please no, I don't want any."

"Aw, what's wrong?" The man sounded amused. "Don't tell me the big bad vampire is scared of a little water?"

That was exactly the case. Boris stared fearfully at the water. "Wha... what is it you want to know?"

"Just one thing," the man said reasonably. "Tell me what I want to know and I'll leave you be. All I want is the location of Lord Akashiya's home."

Boris stared at the masked face. "Lord Akashiya? The elder?"

"That's right, tell me where he lives and I'll be on my merry way. Otherwise," he poured a little water out onto the grass right next to his prisoner.

Boris squirmed within his chains. "I don't know!" He said terrified. "I've never even met any of the five elders! How would I know where any of them reside?"

"So you have no idea where he is?" The man said in a steady tone.

"I don't, I swear it!"

"I see," the man said calmly. "Well then, hard way it is!" He took his canteen and began to pour it out over the vampire's head.

The moment the water touched his skin Boris began to howl in pain. Energy actually crackled and sparked through the air like small charges of raw electricity. It was the energy of his demonic aura being forcibly drawn out of him by the purifying water.

Naruto ignored the pitiful screams and did not stop pouring until every last drop was out of his canteen. When it was finally empty he tossed it away and looked down at his writhing and pathetic prisoner.

"Now let's try this again..."

He was eager to get to it, there was no more time to waste, this was the last day and he had to get the information.

Moka stood there as lifeless and still as a mannequin. She had on her blood red wedding gown. The drow seamstress was busy with the final alterations. Her father was keen to have everything go smoothly tomorrow.

I am going to be married to Kento tomorrow. She thought dully. *And after the ceremony he and I will...* She shook her head and refused to think about that, it was just too revolting. For the past six days her *darling* fiancé had been trying everything he could think of to get an early start to their nuptials. He gave her flowers, asked to take her for walks, tried to sneak into her room, and had even tried to kiss her. When he had done that she had been forcibly reminded of Sasuke and sorely tempted to handle things the same way. But rather than neuter him she'd satisfied herself with just beating him unconscious while telling him to know his place.

The spineless coward had gone to her father to complain. When her father had summoned her to his chambers she had explained that she would do.

"After we are married I will perform my wifely duties." She had informed her father. *"I'll shut my eyes and bear it as best I can, but I am not going to endure that until I have to. If he doesn't like it he can find someone else to marry."*

She had expected father to be upset with her defiance. But instead he had actually seemed pleased by it and agreed there was no reason for her to do anything prior to the ceremony.

"You make me proud daughter," her father had said. *"You have a strong will to go along with a sharp mind and powerful body."* He had actually smiled at her then. *"I expect your children will be truly fearsome."*

Seeing his approval she had made one last desperate attempt to change his mind. *" Father, if you think so well of me then please, let me choose the father of my children. Naruto is no ordinary human, he is amazingly strong and has the power of a demon lord locked inside him. Together our children would..."*

" No," He had cut her off. His good mood had evaporated and he looked at her stern and unforgiving. *" A human is still a human in his mind, no matter how much power he may gain. Besides, in my journeys in the human world I knew a few like him. The humans call them; 'jinchuuriki' and they are always sad and pathetic creatures despite their power. They grow up despised and feared by their own kind. They always end in being consumed by rage or by loneliness, and some simply go mad. I will not allow such a creature to father the children of my trueborn daughter."*

And that had been that. Her father had refused to listen to another word on the subject. So tomorrow she would marry Kento and go off to live with him. She had no choice and so she would bear it as best she could. In time perhaps she would grow used to it. And she would love her children she was sure, no matter how she might loathe their father. In time it would be all right, surely.

"Why are you crying?" The seamstress asked.

Moka wiped her cheeks; she hadn't realized what she had been doing. "I was thinking about my impending marriage."

"So they're tears of joy?"

"Of course," she said sadly. "What else could they be?"

"Please... no... no more," a weary and beaten Boris pleaded. "I swear I don't know where the elder lives." His tormenter glared down at him.

"I believe you," the words came out with an effort. After hours it was clear his prisoner was completely broken. The story had not changed from the beginning, he was simply ignorant. "I guess I may as well end it now."

Boris saw him lift up a hand and he closed his eyes hoping it would at least be quick. His interrogator could see him trembling.

"You know you really are pretty pathetic for a monster."

There was a sickening, 'crunch' and Boris flinched, but he felt no pain. When he finally opened his eyes he was all alone and the chains holding him had been severed.

A supremely angry and annoyed Naruto returned to the bus where the driver and Kuyou had waited the entire time.

One look at Naruto's stride told Kuyou all he needed to know. "This one didn't know either did he?"

Naruto glared at him. "Just how the hell do they NOT know where their leaders live?! In Konoha you had better believe everyone knew where the Hyuuga mansion and the Hokage Tower were."

Kuyou shrugged. "If they lived in their own secret world they probably would know. But since they all live separately, and they all value privacy it's not surprising it's not common knowledge."

Naruto could only growl. It was so damn frustrating! He'd spent the last six days criss crossing the globe tracking down and interrogating vampires. But NONE of them had known where Lord Akashiya's home might be. Despite all his efforts he'd come up with nothing. And now he was out of time. According to why Kokoa had told him Moka would be getting married tomorrow! He knew he had to stop it, but how could he do that without knowing where to go?

"Come on we have to go," he stepped on the bus followed closely by Kuyou.

"So where do you want to go next?" The bus driver asked.

"I have reports of vampires in London," Kuyou said. He'd brought along a list of vampire haunts through out the human world. He'd been the one to give Naruto his targets.

"No," Naruto said harshly. "I can't waste any more time with these damn idiots." He turned to the bus driver. "Take us back to the academy."

The bus driver nodded and closed the door. "If you're thinking about asking the Headmaster again I'm afraid you're out of luck. He left the campus on an indefinite journey shortly after you set out."

Naruto grunted, he *had* been thinking about that. "I'm going to get Yukari's personnel file and see if I can find her. Maybe she has a spell that can help me find Moka."

"That seems like a slim possibility Naruto-sama." Kuyou said.

"It's better than wasting more time with dead ends. I'm almost out of time. Do you have a better idea?" Kuyou shook his head. "Then let's get back to the academy as fast as we can."

"All right," the bus driver said jovially.

When the school bus returned to the academy parking lot there was figure standing there waiting for them. Naruto recognized her as Keito the rather stern looking girl who acted as Kuyou's right hand within the Student Police Committee. She sent Naruto a hard look and instead hurried up to Kuyou. Naruto ignored her and started to head for the Headmaster's office when Kuyou called to him.

"Naruto-sama, it seems someone has been wanting to talk to you for the last three days."

"I don't have time now," he called back not breaking stride.

"You might want to talk to her," Keito called out. "It's not often a vampire is so patient."

He stopped in his tracks and turned around. "A vampire?"

She was waiting for him in Kuyou's office. A woman in a scarlet cloak with a hood covering her face and hair. When Naruto, Kuyou, and Keito entered she rose gracefully up out of the chair she had been sitting in. She turned towards Naruto.

"At last," she said. "I have been waiting a long time to talk to you."

When he'd heard a mysterious female vampire had come here looking for him he'd had hopes of course that it was Moka. Failing that he'd hoped it might be Kokoa with another message for him. tasting the air he knew immediately that she was someone else, her scent was completely unfamiliar to him. "Who are you?" He demanded. "Do you know where Moka is?"

The woman stood perfectly still. "Could we talk alone?"

Naruto immediately turned to the other two in the room. "Leave us."

Keito bristled not only at the words but the tone behind them. "This is Kuyou's office, you don't..."

Naruto looked directly at her. "Leave... us."

Kuyou recognized that look and quickly guided Keito and himself out of the office.

As soon as they were alone Naruto focused completely on the mysterious woman. "All right, who are you and why are you here?"

She spoke slowly and deliberately. "I have been wanting to meet you for some time Naruto. I have gotten letters about you and have been very curious to find out exactly what sort of man you are. I do wish though we could have met under better circumstances."

She's gotten letters about me? Is she some sort of spy? "I think I should warn you I am in absolutely no mood to play games. The woman I love is about to marry someone else and I am almost out of time to stop it."

"And just what would you do to stop it?" She asked curiously.

"Anything," he answered immediately.

"Anything?"

"Yes, anything!" He snapped. "I love Moka-chan with all my heart and I am ready to do anything to get her back."

"Would you even risk almost certain death?"

"Of course," he said as if that were nothing important. "She's the only one I truly love, there's **nothing** I wouldn't do to be with her. I'd rather die trying to get her back than live without her."

A soft sigh escaped her. "Ah, you really are like the letters said, I'm so very glad."

"O.k., who are you?"

"Hmmm, well my maiden name was Bara Mai," she reached up and pulled down her hood. "But my married name is Akashiya."

"Akashiya?!" He was staring at her. She was a beautiful woman with long pink hair and green eyes. And she had a gentle smile that he was completely familiar with. Around her neck was a collar with a rosario attached to it. Even though he had never laid eyes on her, her face was very familiar. There was absolutely no denying the family resemblance.

"That's right Naruto, I am Akashiya Mai, Moka's mother, please call me kaasan. Now we have much to talk about and little time."

An uninvited guest

It was sunset in the secret world of the goblins. The sky was turning a magnificent deep purple. In a desolate corner of this dark world lay castle Akashiya. It was a massive and imposing structure carved of granite and built atop a lonely cliff overlooking the sea. The iron gates were open and the vast courtyard was ready. Sixty or so seats had been placed to accommodate the wedding party and the guests. A short distance away tables were laid out with wines, beers, sake, and all sorts of liquor. There were vast chests of ice containing transfusion packs with the blood of different races such as succubi, ogre, or lamia. Most of it was human blood of course, but there was something to suit almost every taste. A band of dark elves readied their instruments to play the bridal march and then to play for the dances which would follow. Most of the guests had already arrived and been seated. When the sun sank beneath the horizon it would be night and the ceremony would begin.

Lord Akashiya was standing by the gates, playing the role of host. As each guest arrived he personally welcomed them to his home. Along with being the host and the father of the bride he would also be the one to actually perform the ceremony. He was pleased to see almost everyone expected had come. The refreshments were all in order and the reception area made ready. The bride and groom were waiting in their respective rooms for the signal to come down. From the happy conversation coming from the guests it was clear everyone was eager to have the festivities begin. Thus far things were going exactly as planned. He was pleased.

Before the gates black flames momentarily appeared and then vanished. There before him was a figure he had not really been expecting to see today. But he was glad to see her. She was dressed in a formal gown of pink and white and was every bit as beautiful as he remembered. She approached him with a slow and stately gate her green eyes locked on his red ones. As she came up to him he gave her a genuine smile and took her right hand in his.

"It is good to see you again Mai," he placed a soft kiss upon her hand. "I was beginning to think you would not come."

"I would never miss such an important event in my baby's life." She said. "Can we talk in private for a bit?"

He frowned slightly but still nodded. "Certainly, though I suspect I know what it is you wish to discuss." He extended his arm to her and together they walked through the courtyard towards the castle itself. They took a wide route to avoid the guests and prying ears. Looking at the beautiful woman who was still his wife Lord Akashiya grinned wistfully. "It really is very good to see you again Mai."

She looked over at him in surprise. "Really?"

"Why do you sound so surprised? I never wanted you to leave, that was your choice."

"You left me no choice," she said with a trace of bitterness in her voice.

"You could have stayed," he insisted.

"And watched as you filled our daughter and the other girls with your beliefs?"

"All I have ever tried to do is make them strong," he said. "I only wanted them to be able to find their proper places."

"You taught them to look down on all those not of our race. You taught them to be suspicious and untrusting."

"I taught them to rely only on themselves and their own strengths." He said firmly. "The world does not belong to the weak. It belongs only to the strong. That is as true here as on the human world. Perhaps you find that truth a little bitter. Personally I prefer it to any sort of lie, no matter how sweet."

"All I wanted was for them to treat others with respect and tolerance and for them to be able to give and receive love."

He snorted. "Love is nothing but a comforting illusion."

She looked at him sadly. "I loved you... once."

Her words left him feeling unhappy. She really was a dear woman and a very strong vampire. But she was young; she still didn't understand just how cruel people could be. "I still care for you Mai," he said quietly. "Just as I care for Moka and all my children. But I will not pretend that those feelings are anything more than what they are."

She shook her head. "You say you care for your children, but look what your efforts have done to them. Moka was miserable and lonely. Kokoa doesn't know how to relate to anyone except through fighting. Karua is emotionally unstable, smiling and laughing one moment then crying the next as she becomes a cold hearted killer. As for Ria..."

"Do not mention Ria," he said stiffly.

"Why not?" She asked pointedly. "Certainly she is the strongest of the four. I would think you would be very proud of her."

"What happened to her was never my intent. I never meant for her to become so cruel." He said defensively.

"But how can you be surprised? You never showed any of them affection, you never taught them how to love or how to trust, not even with each other! You did everything you could to make them hard."

"That's right Mai, I did. Soft things die easily, hard things can endure. I wanted my children to be survivors. I never wanted them to be weak."

"Love is not weakness," she said.

He gave her a look that was a bit affectionate. *Still so young and naïve.* "Of course it is. Just look at yourself. The moment things became too difficult you ran away, and Moka did the very same thing. Do you imagine I would ever run away? From anything?" He shook his head in mild rebuke. "All love does is make one vulnerable in all sorts of ways."

"Don't you care for Moka's happiness at all?" She asked.

"I do want her to be happy," he admitted. "But first she must fulfill her duties to this family and to our race. She is welcome to find whatever happiness she can *after* doing what is required of her."

"How can she be happy in a loveless marriage?"

"You were," he pointed out. "At least for a time." They had come to the castle entrance. "Why don't you go ahead and tell Moka to come down? I'm sure she'd be happy to see you." As he turned to go she grabbed a hold of his arm.

"Husband," she said fervently. "Please, I beg you, stop this. Don't force Moka into this. If you'll call off the wedding I'll come back to live with you again."

"Don't be ridiculous Mai," he shook off her hold. "Now at least *try* and remember that you are a vampire and stop behaving like such a weakling." He strode off quickly to keep her from making a scene.

She watched him go. *You are wrong husband. When it comes to my daughter I can be every bit as ruthless as you.* She hurried into the castle and headed for her daughter's room.

She was in her room staring into the mirror. Her blood red wedding dress was made of the finest silk and seemed to almost glow in the

room's light. Father had, had it especially made for her. It was one more expensive gift she wished he'd never given her.

She was not alone in her room. Her two sisters would be her bridesmaids and were dressed in their own gowns of silver and black.

"I'm sorry neesan," Kokoa said quietly. "Maybe it won't be so bad." She knew her beautiful and powerful sister was miserable.

"What's so bad?" Karua said cheerfully. "She looks so beautiful! Like a doll come to life! Everyone will look at her and be sooooo jealous!"

"And then she'll have to go and live with that baka Kento." Kokoa said.

"Who's a baka?" The door to Moka's room swung open and Kento stepped inside smiling gleefully. Whatever else people might say no one could deny that at least he was handsome. He was slightly taller than Moka with broad shoulders and a muscular body. He was dressed in a formal black and white suit. He had thick black hair that ran all the way down his neck. His red eyes looked at his bride with raw hunger. She however deliberately kept her back to him.

"What are you doing here baka?" Kokoa demanded angrily.

"Oh I just wanted to get a little preview of my beautiful wife in her lovely dress." Kento said, his eyes never leaving Moka.

"Awww, how sweet!" Karua gushed and giggled.

Kento focused one of his dazzling smiles at the older sister. "Could I have a few minutes alone with my blushing bride?"

Kokoa puffed up like a toad and was about to tell him to get out when Karua grabbed her by the arm. "That is sooooo romantic! Come on little sister let's leave the two lovebirds alone!" She left the room dragging Kokoa along.

Kento chuckled. "I like your older sister, she's really very amusing."

"Perhaps you should marry her instead then," Moka said dryly. "I'm sure she would give you more smiles and laughter than I will. At least until you did something to make her cry, then she would probably kill you." Moka finally turned away from the mirror so that she was facing him. "You know the humans have a custom that says if the groom sees the bride in her wedding dress prior to the ceremony there will be bad fortune."

"Good thing we're not human then."

"What do you want?" Moka said in annoyance.

"Oh I just wanted to let you know that I haven't forgotten how you humiliated me in front of your father." He said smoothly. "I plan on spending the whole night teaching you **your** place. I plan on making you a proper and obedient little wife."

She stared back at him coldly. "If you think you can control me you are sadly mistaken. Better monsters than you have tried and failed."

"Oh but I have one thing all those others didn't. I have your father's blessing. He intends for you to behave like a proper wife and I'll settle for nothing less."

"My father intends for me to bear your children," Moka reminded him. "As far as that goes I will shut my eyes and suffer it. But if you expect me to be your servant you are an even bigger fool than I ever imagined."

His smile thinned and he took a step towards her. "Show me proper respect woman, or you'll regret it."

"If you want my respect then try and earn it," she stood her ground and looked at him disdainfully.

"As your husband you have to respect me." He took another step towards her.

"No, I have to sleep with you. Respect has nothing to do with it."

Another step put him right in front of her. She defiantly looked him in the eye with undisguised contempt. He couldn't stand it and felt anger building in him. Lord Akashiya had honored him with this marriage. He would not have her making him look like a fool. "Listen to me woman..."

The door to the room suddenly opened and a lady in a pink and white dress entered. Her hair was pink and her eyes red. She held a rosario in her hand. Kento couldn't help but notice the powerful demonic aura that surrounded her.

"Pardon me," the woman said in a sweet voice. "But it is almost time for the ceremony to begin. The two of you should get down to the courtyard."

Kento frowned at her. "Leave us; I still have some things to say to my bride. We'll be down in a few minutes."

In response she moved like a blur and grabbed a hold of his ear.

"Ow!" He yelped. For a moment he thought she was about to rip it clean off. He was compelled to follow as she dragged him by the ear to the door. "Ow! Let go of me! Who the hell are you?!"

"I am Moka's mother," she replied pleasantly. "And I don't care for people who threaten my baby. You had best keep that in mind." She opened up the door and finally let go of him.

He blushed with embarrassment. Both at having his new mother in law overhearing what he'd said and at the fact that he'd just been defeated by *another* woman. Trying to retrieve the situation he gave her a bright smile and turned on the charm. "Please forgive my rudeness kaasan."

She returned his smile with one of her own. "No, I don't think I will," she said agreeably. "And if you ever call me kaasan again I really will rip that ear off." She slammed the door in his face.

"Mother," Moka ran up to her and hugged her. "Mother what are you doing here?"

Mai embraced her daughter and held her close. "How could I not come? I knew you would need me, for a shoulder to cry on if nothing else."

Moka slowly let go of her and gave her a brave smile. "I won't cry mother, I've accepted my fate. I'll do what's required of me without tears or complaints."

"My dear child," Mai gently touched her daughter's face. "Perhaps things are not as hopeless as you believe."

"But they are," Moka said stoically. "Father will never change his mind."

"Well then, we'll just have to *make* him change his mind won't we?"

"But how can we do that?" Moka wanted to believe there was some way out of this.

"You'll have to wait and see dear," she gently took her daughter's hand. "But it's time now. Let's go out to the courtyard."

Beyond the outer wall and the gate black flames appeared as an uninvited guest arrived. The ceremony was just beginning and so no one had noticed. Standing outside the enormous castle he could hear music start to play. He headed towards the open gate.

Invited or not he was about to make his presence known.

Something scary

Kento approached his soon to be father in law and smiled graciously at him. Lord Akashiya looked past him to the castle entrance and frowned slightly. "We are about to begin. Where is Moka?"

"She is speaking with her mother," Kento said smoothly. "I am sure she will be down momentarily father."

"What did you say?" Lord Akashiya replied sharply.

"I said she should be down shortly fa..."

"Do **not** call me father," the elder vampire sneered at him. "Even after you marry my daughter you will refer to me as Lord Akashiya. You will **never** refer to me as father or by any other title that suggests a familiarity or trust between us. I do not like or respect you Kento, you are a vain and shallow idiot."

Kento stared at the man in open shock. "Then why did you ask me to marry your daughter?"

"Because despite your many faults you at least have a good bit of strength. You should be able to give my daughter strong children. For that, and that alone, I will tolerate you and permit you to enter this family. But never think you are anything more to me. Know your place boy."

When the elder vampire turned away from him Kento quickly fled. It seemed both his in laws were less than happy with him.

Moka and her mother appeared only a few minutes later. Mai gave her daughter a last kiss on the cheek and a few words of encouragement before going to take her seat. Moka's father looked to her and nodded his approval. He was standing at the head of the aisle before all the guests ready to begin. She took a deep breath

and screwed on a tranquil face. *I will not cry or make a scene. What must be must be, I will be strong and bear this burden.* Calmly she walked to the back of the aisle where Kento and her sisters already waited. *At least I have known true love, even if only for a short while. How many never even have that much?*

Every eye watched as she took the spot beside Kento and he held out his arm to her. She placed one hand on it and steeled herself. Standing a few feet behind her Kokoa looked miserable while Karua wore a wide smile and threatened to burst out into laughter at any moment. Every eye was focused on them and more than a few of the guests were struck by what a stunning couple they made.

Smiling for one and all to see Kento whispered to her. "You belong to me now."

Turning a serene face to him she whispered back. "Sorry, but I already belong to someone else."

At a signal from Lord Akashiya the band started to play the march. The two of them began the slow walk down the aisle. Moka wondered if anyone else thought the familiar tune sounded especially mournful. The two of them came to the head of the aisle and halted. Lord Akashiya smiled. "Honored guests and family," he called out. "Let us join these two in lasting union." The ceremony had finally begun.

Naruto heard the music begin to play. *I guess I'm right on time.* He approached the open gate expecting to be challenged, or at least noticed. But there was no one there. So he simply walked through the gate and into a vast courtyard surrounded by the outer wall. Looking at the scene before him he was struck by how oddly familiar it all seemed. A band was playing, there were tables ready for a feast, flowers decorated the grounds (they were all black, silver, and red) there were guests seated in little folding chairs, and he even thought some of the women in the audience were crying. His eyes however focused on the three people standing before everyone else.

One of them had on a red dress. He took a deep breath and was able to pick out her scent from the dozens others. *Moka-chan*. He began to approach her.

As her father continued to drone on Moka stopped listening. At some point Kento would say, 'I do' and then she would too and it would be official. She was thinking of Naruto and their ceremony. It had been just the two of them being married by a simple monk in a little country shrine. It could not have been more of a contrast to today. She'd been so unbelievably happy to have married him. She'd had no idea what the future held in store, but it hadn't mattered because she'd known that they would always be together. She wanted desperately to be with him now. In fact she wanted it so badly she was even imagining that she could smell his scent, it even seemed very strong.

"For if one believes in commitment one must set aside all other things," Lord Akashiya continued. "To stand together through all hardships and..."

"Excuse me!" A loud voice rang out. "But when are you getting to the part about if anyone objects? That's sort of the only part I'm waiting for."

Lord Akashiya cut off and suddenly looked up. He had been concentrating on the ceremony and had not noticed the new arrival. He was not the only one. Everyone turned in their seats to stare at the person who had dared to interrupt. He was standing at the very back of the aisle casually smiling back. He had spiky platinum blonde hair and red eyes; he was dressed all in black in what looked like work clothes with pouches and various tools attached. Compared to the elegance that surrounded him his appearance was jarring. But looking at him the crowd seemed able to sense something else was well. His demonic aura was in check and certainly his posture did not seem threatening. Yet somehow they could tell that there was power hidden inside this one. They

instinctively leaned away from him and remained silent as they watched to see what would happen next.

The second Moka saw him she gasped. Her bridal bouquet slipped through her fingers and fell to the ground unnoticed. He was really here; he had really come for her. Their eyes met and instinct took over.

"IDIOT!" She screamed and ran to him. "Idiot, idiot, idiot I told you not to come here!" She screamed furiously.

Seeing Moka running at him with such fury Naruto suddenly looked confused, and a little scared. "But I..."

She gave him absolutely no chance to explain himself. Instead she leapt onto him and grabbed his face as she roughly brought her mouth down onto his. Her tongue entered his mouth and she savagely used it. Her kiss was passionate and desperate, she wanted to taste him, wanted to suck him in and consume him.

When she had leapt onto him she had wound up knocking him over. She was lying on top of him, her legs straddling his hips and pressing down. She could feel him respond to her pressure and ground herself against him even as she continued to try and suck out his tongue. When she had to pull her mouth back she couldn't help it, she let out a little moan of pleasure.

Still lying pinned beneath her Naruto was giving her one of his huge smiles. "So, did you miss me?"

"You really are an idiot," she tried to sound angry but couldn't manage it at all. Her words sounded loving instead.

"Just so long as I'm your idiot." He possessively pulled her back down and began kissing her some more.

"Little sister," Karua yelled out. "You're being naughty with the wrong boy."

Karua's shout snapped them out of their moment and back to reality. They scrambled back up to their feet.

Meanwhile Lord Akashiya and Kento had watched the scene along with everyone else. Both of them caught so off guard as to not know what to do. Not surprisingly it was Lord Akashiya who snapped out of it first. He turned to Kento. "Well?"

"Huh?" Kento looked at him confused.

"Another man is molesting your bride," he said patiently trying to hold his wrath in check. "Are you just going to stand there and watch?"

With an embarrassed flush he quickly nodded. "I'll deal with him." Kento stormed down the aisle ready to do all sorts of violence. All he'd wanted was to be treated with respect. That was all. Instead he had been insulted by Kokoa, spurned by Moka, humiliated by his mother in law, belittled by his father in law, and now finally some ignorant fool had just turned him into a laughing stock. It was too much and someone was going have to pay.

He unleashed a massive weight of killer intent at the blonde stranger hoping to make him runaway. Instead he seemed to hardly notice. The stranger was standing next to his bride with an arm draped protectively around her. He was *smiling* as he approached and seemed to not have a care in the world. All that only made Kento even more furious.

"YOU!" Kento screamed. "Just who the hell do you think you are?!"

Naruto smiled at him coldly. "I *think* I'm Moka's husband. Now who the fuck are you?"

" I am Moka's husband, or at least I will be once the ceremony is over."

"Is that a fact?" Naruto said pleasantly.

"That's right!" Kento said furiously. "She belongs to me! Whoever you are it doesn't matter, she can only have one husband!"

"I have to say I'm in agreement with you there." He glanced at Moka. "Moka-chan, do you mind if I kill this guy?"

She looked quite happy. "Please do Naruto-kun."

Kento was about to say something but never got the chance. Naruto's hand latched onto his throat and he could no longer breathe. He tried to pull free but could not move an inch. As he began to claw at Naruto's arm he was forced to watch as Naruto unleashed all of his power. The demonic aura he had so carefully kept in check spilled out of him, its force so great it physically manifested into a living cloak. Before Kento's horrified eyes he saw the aura take on the form of a fox with **eight** swinging about. Dimly Kento heard the sudden screams coming from the guests and they saw and felt this unbelievable power. At that point Kento would gladly have apologized if only he could have. The very last thing he saw was a blinding white light. That was followed by a sense of heat and a fraction of a second of pain. Nothing followed after that.

Before his disbelieving eyes Lord Akashiya saw all his carefully laid plans being destroyed. It had taken years to arrange this marriage and less than two minutes for it to be completely ruined. He saw Kento burned alive and reduced to nothing but ash. His guests were all screaming and quickly vanishing as they teleported away. The drow and his goblin servants were running for their lives. What should have been a beautiful and inspiring ceremony had been turned into a disaster with seeming ease thanks to one man. And that man was standing there amidst this panic *smiling* at him, surrounded by his (admittedly) vast power as though he had actually won something.

"Daddy! Daddy!"

Lord Akashiya turned to see his daughter Karua looking upset and on the verge of tears. "Daddy, everything is ruined! The party is ruined!"

He turned to her and placed a soothing hand on her shoulder. "I know dear, but please don't be upset and don't cry. I would rather not have to render you unconscious."

She nodded and seemed to regain some of her cheerfulness. "Will you punish the bad man who ruined everything daddy?"

"Oh yes," he told her with certainty. "I will certainly punish him."

"Is that really necessary husband?" Mai came up to him.

He looked at his wife disbelieving. "He just killed Moka's fiancé and sent all my guests fleeing. His actions are a direct insult to me."

"He is Moka's husband, her *real* husband." Mai said desperately. "He only did what he had to, to be with her. What he did was out of love for our daughter!"

He looked at her angrily. "One more reason not to have anything to do with love then." Stepping over fallen chairs and other debris Lord Akashiya headed towards Naruto.

Naruto watched calmly as the other man approached.

"Naruto," Moka said urgently. "No matter what has happened he is still my father."

He didn't like hearing that, the man had had her kidnapped after all and nearly forced her to marry someone else! But he gave her a grudging nod. "I understand."

As her father approached Moka stood in front of her husband to get between the two. "Father please stop! Please don't do anything to

the man I love!"

"Step aside Moka," her father came to a halt.

"But father you can see how powerful he is! You have to see that he can be the one to give me the strong children you want."

"That does not matter," Lord Akashiya said coldly. "No matter how strong he is or what form he may take he remains a weak treacherous human in his heart and mind. I will not have a human fathering my trueborn daughter's children!"

Naruto began to laugh sourly. "It figures, for years I had people hate me because they thought I was a demon. Now I'm hated for being human. I really can't catch a break."

"Do you think this is funny?" Lord Akashiya demanded.

"No," Naruto answered. "Losing Moka was never funny, not even for a second." Naruto stared him down. "All I want is to be with your daughter. I love her with everything I have and she loves me. I promise I will always protect her and take care of her. Please just let us go and I give you my solemn word I will hold no grudge against you. I will forgive what you have done."

Lord Akashiya's mouth dropped in amazement. " *You* are going to forgive *me* ?" He shook his head. "Where does such arrogance come from?!"

"You know maybe you shouldn't be the one trying to talk so tough." Naruto snapped back. "Everyone has told me how scary you are but you don't seem like very much to me."

Moka turned back to send him an alarmed look. "Naruto please don't say that!"

Lord Akashiya smiled. "Heh, so is that what you think? Would you like to see something scary?" He placed a hand upon his gold

rosario. "It has been three hundred years since I have fought anyone with my full strength. Come on boy, I'll show you your place."

"Father no!" Moka cried out.

Lord Akashiya pulled off the rosario with a tiny, 'clink' and let it fall to the ground.

That was when the real fight began.

Author's Note: Yes, evil cliffy I know. But I trust you are all used to my cruel ways by now. First off thank you to everyone who has been reading my story and especially thanks to those who have taken the time and effort to leave reviews. This story has had over **600,000** hits and over **3,700** reviews. As a writer I always really appreciate getting such a strong response to my stories. Any way, I just want to go ahead and announce that there will only be three more chapters. As we approach the end I will do my best to bring this tale to a fiery and satisfying conclusion.

Earning respect

The instant the rosario fell away Lord Akashiya was submerged in a violent torrent of demonic aura. It swirled about him a fiery red glow and with a force that even Naruto found impressive.

"Aaaaah!" Lord Akashiya howled in pain as his flesh tore and his bones snapped and grew. His transformation was pure agony and he bore it as best he could. From out of his back two large leathery wing tore from his flesh and expanded until they were about twenty feet across. His spine cracked and snapped as he grew taller. His ribs and other bones snapped and then mended as he grew hideously larger. Muscles and veins tore and melded back together. His clothes ripped apart. His vision darkened as his eyes widened and were pushed back and up into a sloped forehead. His pupils disappeared and his eyes were a single mass of red. His teeth grew wildly until he had a mouth full of long razor sharp fangs. His fingers and toes grew yellowish and pointed claws perfect for rending flesh. His ears grew long and pointed, and on the crown of his head six short horns appeared. Along the whole area of his body thick black fur sprouted.

When the transformation was at last complete Lord Akashiya stood at his full height of nine feet and looked down at Naruto with a monstrous grin. " **A vampire's demonic traits grow stronger with time,**" Akashiya growled in a voice that did not belong to any man. " **The demon in me is strong boy.**"

Naruto stared up at him and tried not to show any fear. The amount of demonic aura that surrounded Lord Akashiya was just plain unbelievable. *All right note to self. When everyone tells you someone is really scary LISTEN to them!* "I don't suppose we could just shake hands and forget this whole thing?"

Lord Akashiya's answer was to bring a fist down on top of his head with thunderous might. A cloud of dirt and earth rose as Naruto's head was slammed to the bottom of a five foot deep crater. Without

his cloak his head would have been smashed to jelly. Seeing his opponent still alive Akashiya picked him up with a single clawed hand and flung him like a rag doll into the gate house. Naruto's body smashed into it bringing the structure and most of the gate itself crashing down on top of him.

"Father please stop this!" Moka ran in front of him and held out her arms. "You've done enough!"

The monstrous Akashiya cast his flattened eyes down at his daughter. " **I have not even begun yet, stand aside Moka.** "

"No!!" Moka shouted up to him. "I won't let you hurt him!"

" **Daughter...** "

The stone rubble that had buried him was suddenly flung aside and Naruto roared with a pure blind fury. He dashed across the courtyard and slammed a fist into Akashiya's belly. Naruto had the satisfaction of seeing an almost human look of surprise on his foe's face as he was sent rocketing backwards into the north tower of his castle. His impact tore open a gaping hole in the tower's base and sent cracks running up it. They could all hear the ominous groan of the huge stone tower beginning to give way.

Naruto heard it too but paid it no mind as he dropped to all fours and raced in through the hole and into the collapsing tower.

"Naruto stop!" Moka called out.

She was ignored and soon animalistic roars and the sound of battle came booming out. They could not see the two of them as they fought on. But as they watched windows exploded and granite blocks were sent flying out of different sections as they would catch a glimpse of an arm or a head as the two seemed to be fighting their way right *through* the castle. The main doors burst open and the goblins servants who remained ran out screaming. Some did not bother with the door and fled out of windows or some of the new

holes. As the goblins fled past them the only witnesses to what was happening were Moka, her mother, and her two sisters.

"I have to stop this!" Moka made for the entrance way but Kokoa grabbed a hold of her arm.

"Neesan are you insane?!" Kokoa screamed at her. For once the girl's fear was plain to see. "You can feel their power! You can't get between them!"

"I have to!" She yanked free of her little sister's grip. "If I don't Naruto-kun will die!"

"No he won't," Mai stepped in front of her daughter. "He's not going to die Moka."

"How can you know that?!" Moka demanded.

"I know," Mai said sternly. "I can't tell you how or why but I am certain that Naruto will survive this. You can't get involved, none of us can. As strong as we all may be they are on a whole other level. Trying to interfere will only get you killed or badly hurt. Trust in me and let this play out."

"But..."

"Trust in me," Mai said. "And trust in him too. I don't think Naruto is the type to die so easily."

As Mai was convincing her daughter not to act Karua was dancing around waving her arms, cheering wildly as she saw her ancestral home being torn apart. "Kill him daddy! Kill him! Suck him dry and then eat his little heart!"

"SHUT UP!!" Moka slammed a fist into her older sister's face sending her flying and finally quieting her.

Just then a final portentous rumble could be heard, as the castle began to collapse. Its steepled roofs all began to fall in and then the

walls began to give way. The north tower was the first part to go, as the whole structure began to slowly lean forward like a tree just about to fall. It was leaning down towards them.

Kokoa neatly and accurately described the situation. "Crap! Run!"

The three of them ran with Moka scooping up her unconscious sibling. The tower a last snapping crack and finally came tumbling down into the now empty courtyard. Right behind it the other towers began to collapse and the main castle walls fell in with a deafening crash.

In less than five minutes of fighting a massive stone castle that had stood for almost a thousand years had been reduced to rubble.

Out of that small mountain of debris and granite blocks Naruto was sent flying. He landed on the edge of the sea cliff and had to sink his hands into the bedrock to keep from going over. He was just getting back to his feet when Akashiya leapt out of the ruins to land in front of him. If possible Lord Akashiya was in even more of a rage than he had been. " **You have destroyed my home boy!**"

Despite his foe's rage Naruto managed a grin. "I only helped; you definitely get a share of the credit."

Akashiya brought his fist down and the earth shook. A huge crack formed where he had struck and before Naruto could do anything he felt himself and the ground he was on begin to plummet. The piece of cliff he was on went vertical and he was tossed off into free fall. Seeing the black water rushing up to greet him he did the only thing he could transforming from an eight tailed vampire into a seven tailed half youkai kitsune. The transformation had only just been completed when he hit the water. He and the cliff struck and raised a huge splash. As the stone cliff quickly sunk to the bottom the waters calmed. There was no sign of Naruto.

From the edge of the new cliff Akashiya looked down furiously. He could see no sign of the arrogant boy. Not believing for a second that

he might be dead Akashiya stretched out his wings and took flight. He soared downwards towards the water and then banked around into a vast circle about a hundred feet above it. High enough to avoid any possible wave or sudden gush of water. He circled, watching the sea.

He was not disappointed as he saw Naruto suddenly pop up. He stood there on the water as if it were dry land. He seemed to have mutated from a noble vampire into some type of monstrous bastardization of a kitsune. Akashiya also noted he had lost some of his power.

Naruto wasted no time and ran through a series of hand signs. He was a fire and wind type but he had learned jutsus from all five elements. He could never wield them as strongly as he could wind and fire jutsus. But with this much chakra at his fingertips he could still wield them at a level beyond a Kage's. " **Water Style: Hydra Dragon Missiles.**" Out of the ocean around him eight dragons made of water launched themselves at their target. They quickly and easily reached the needed height.

Akashiya was caught by surprise by this attack and was forced to twist and dodge to keep from being struck. One after another the damn things came at him. He flapped his wings and moved jinking up and down and left to right, keeping just ahead of each of them. Though difficult he was finally able to bank to the right and escape them.

Or so he thought. Just as he turned he felt the pressure of one more coming straight at him. In avoiding the other eight he had actually been maneuvered toward a ninth that had been created after the other eight. Too late to dodge he was struck by it full force. He howled in pain as his demonic power leached out of him in the form of electric energy like dozens of lightning bolts. Momentarily weakened he could no longer fly and fell into the sea.

"Hurry!" Mai shouted. "We need to get down to the beach!" She and the three girls ran down a twisting path.

Akashiya burst up out of the water gasping for air. Lightning continued to pour from him as pain wracked his body. His sodden wings would no longer hold him aloft but fortunately he was not far from the water's edge. Clamping down on the pain he worked his muscles and swam to the sandy shore. He dragged himself ashore, still drenched and weakened.

"If you want we can end this now." Naruto called as he chakra walked out of the water and onto the beach. He was still in his half kitsune seven tail mode. "Moka doesn't want me to kill you so I'm willing to stop now. All I ask is that you acknowledge me as Moka's husband and just leave us alone."

Though feeling diluted and weary Akashiya rose back to his full height. " **You expect me to acknowledge you?** "

"Why shouldn't you? Haven't I proven myself?"

Akashiya eyed him carefully for a moment. " **You are strong, that much I will admit. But your humanity makes you unfit to be with my daughter .** "

Naruto gave him a hostile glare. "I love your daughter more than life itself and there is nothing I wouldn't do for her. I've even decided to become a vampire so that I can be with her, her entire life. What more do you want?"

" **I want my daughter to marry a true born vampire.**"

"Of course," Naruto said bitterly. "It would be something I can't do. I don't control what form I was born in. Ask for anything that can be done and it will be. I would do anything for her!"

Again Akashiya stared at him for a moment. **" I think that I believe you, more is the pity you were born human. I know your race and I know even of you jinchuuriki. Whatever your strengths your failings are still too great to be ignored. Because you truly care for my daughter I will forgive the insults you have given me and I will permit you to live. But you will not be allowed to be with my daughter."**

Naruto transformed back into his vampiric form with eight tails. In one hand he gathered fire that was white hot. "I won't be separated from Moka, not by anyone, not even her father. If I have to kill you to be with her then I will."

" That is exactly what you must do," Akashiya began to slowly walk towards Naruto. His huge paces swallowing up the distance between them. **" The only way to be with my daughter is to kill me."**

Naruto held his ground as Moka's father quickly approached. "Is there no other way?" he demanded.

" None."

Please forgive me Moka. "I'm sorry." Just as Akashiya reached him he unleashed a gout of white fire aimed straight at the middle of his chest. The fire struck and before his eyes the monstrous Lord Akashiya dissolved into grey mist. *What the hell? Is that how elder vampires die?*

The mist curled around his flames and flowed along the ground until it reached him and surrounded him and his cloak.

"Aaaaah!" He cried out as he felt ice stabbing through his body. He felt the warmth and strength being sucked out of him. As the cold grew worse he felt his body become stiff and unable to move. The red chakra cloak began to slowly flicker and fade. As his strength bled away he heard Lord Akashiya's voice coming from all around him.

" It is a vampire's nature to take strength and vitality from his foe. This is my ultimate attack, the ability to drain you of your very life force without even needing to touch you. Against this all your strength and defenses are nothing."

Unable to move or respond the cloak disappeared and he pitched forward unconscious.

Naruto came to still in his vampiric form but unable to draw out his demonic aura, though he still had a little demonic power available to him. He was currently being held up in the air by one of Akashiya's arms. The monstrous vampire was staring down at him with his flat red eyes and an upturned mouth filled with jagged teeth.

" It is over boy. You gave me a much better fight than I expected and even cost me my castle. But there was never any way you could defeat me with your power. Admit defeat and agree never to see my daughter again and I will spare your life. If you defy me once more I will end you here and now. Make your choice."

Naruto looked back at him as he carefully reached into a pocket. *I guess Mia knew what she was talking about. It's played out just as she said it would.*

The Previous Day

"You won't be able to defeat him in combat." Mai said as she took a sip of her tomato juice. "But you won't have to."

Naruto frowned at her. "Look, I don't know how strong Moka's dad is but I'm not exactly a weakling myself."

Mai nodded. "I know that Naruto, if you were I wouldn't be here helping you. I'd be telling you to forget my daughter. If you were weak it would suicide for you to try this. But since you **are** strong you should at least be able to give my husband a good fight. Even if he is

furious with you he'll want to have some, 'last words' with you before he actually kills you. Thinking you beaten his guard will be down. That will be your one and only chance to use what I've shown you."

Looking unhappy Naruto nodded. "If it comes to that point I'll use it, but I intend to beat him with my own strength."

"Good, do your best!" She said. "But keep the Headmaster's gift close by, just in case."

Naruto took the item from his pocket and into his right hand unnoticed. "If you know jinchuuriki does that mean you know about ninja too?"

The horned head nodded. " **I knew ninja long before any of the villages were founded. I knew them in the time of the emperors when their arts were still outlawed and they were all see as criminals. What of it?**"

Naruto smiled. "I'm a ninja."

" **So?**"

"So if you really knew ninja you would know that our greatest weapon isn't raw strength or jutsus. It's deception." With that he slapped the, 'rosary of judgment' onto his arm and spoke the incantation. " **Zaros nivii athos trula zuul!**" Using vampiric magic he activated the rosary and formed the seal.

" **What?!**" Too late Lord Akashiya realized he'd been tricked. As his vast powers were suddenly sealed back into him he again howled in agony at the transformation. This time he was too weakened and was forced into unconsciousness.

When he awoke he lying outside the ruins of castle Akashiya surrounded by his family members. Kokoa and Karua were looking

at him worriedly while Moka was a short distance away *kissing* that boy.

"What is..."

"Now, now, take it easy dear you're not very strong at the moment."

"Mai?" He realized he was lying on the ground with his head in his wife's lap. "What's going on here?" He tried to sit up and was surprised when she easily pushed him back down.

She laughed to see the expression on his face. "I am afraid you lost husband and all of your powers have been *completely* suppressed. I am afraid that right now you are only as strong as a very young vampire." She took a hold of his wrist and showed him the rosary of judgment still attached to it. It looked as though it were glued to his skin.

Lord Akashiya grabbed a hold of it and tried to rip, it free. Only to find it wouldn't come off.

"I'm afraid it won't come off dear, at least not by your hand. Naruto used a special enchantment that I taught him."

His eyes narrowed dangerously. "That you taught him? Did you betray me?"

She continued to smile. "I don't think I betrayed you, rather I was acting in the best interests of my family and of my daughter. She loves him very much and I think he is more than strong enough to be a good husband to her and a fine father someday. I was hoping you would see that for yourself, but just in case I gave Naruto my assistance."

He sat up and this time Mai did not try to stop him. "This changes nothing; I will still not accept him."

"Well in that case we have a problem," she said pleasantly. "How are you going to survive as an elder vampire when you are essentially powerless? What will the other elders do to you if they find out?"

He blanched. If they found out he would not survive the day. "Are you wanting me to be killed?"

She let out a sigh. "Of course not, if anyone had wanted that you would never have awakened. All we want is for you to acknowledge Naruto as Moka's husband and to let me come back and help you raise the kids."

"You want to come back?" He said in surprise.

"That's right; maybe after all this you'll be willing to admit that feelings of love can be a strength after all."

He considered it. "Perhaps," he said doubtfully.

"Agree or the rosary stays where it is." Mia said.

"It seems I have no choice," he nodded his head in defeat. "Very well, I accept your terms; I will acknowledge him as my son and as Moka's husband."

Mai raised an interested eyebrow. Acknowledging Naruto as son had not been one of the conditions, and he had not intended to do that with Kento. It would seem that Naruto had actually won his respect. "Good." She placed his gold rosario back on the chain around his collar.

"Tell me something," he asked. "Just what sort of enchantment is it?"

"It has the same exact one I cast on Moka's rosario when she was just a little girl. She wanted to try living in the human world but was afraid she might pull off the rosario in a moment of panic or someone else might pull it off by mistake. So I set a special condition that she could not remove it herself and that only someone who loves her

would be able to remove it." She laughed. "And so you know Naruto was able to remove it almost from the moment they met."

Lord Akashiya looked at her in horror. "So this can only be removed by someone who loves me?"

"That's right."

"Then I really am doomed."

She looked at him and began to laugh. "You know my husband, sometimes you really are an idiot." She reached over and easily removed the rosary of judgment.

"But... Mai that means you..."

"Yes," leaning over she placed a gentle kiss on his lips. "And I always will."

After another series of kisses she leaned against him and sighed. "So I guess we'll be going back to the mansion as soon as we straighten everything out with father."

"Mansion?"

Moka nodded. "I'm not crazy about going back to that village though."

"Oh about that," Naruto suddenly recalled. "We won't be going back."

"We won't?" Moka was surprised.

He nodded and rubbed the back of his head feeling a little embarrassed. "Yeah I sort of burned the mansion down when I left... along with a good bit of the village."

"So you finally got your revenge?"

"Oh no, it was nothing more than a down payment. That debt is still owing, but at least now they understand my true feelings for them."

"So that means they'll be coming after you?"

He nodded. "If we go anywhere they can reach me yeah. After all ninja were originally created to be assassins."

"So where are we going to live?"

He gave her a winning smile. "Youkai academy, there's going to be space in the Headmaster's place soon."

She had more questions but he cut her off by kissing her again. Questions and explanations could wait. The important thing was that they were together again.

The Headmaster

Three Years Later

What seemed like an ordinary yellow school bus with the words, 'Youkai Academy' stenciled on the side pulled up to the designated street corner. There a young boy and girl dressed in similar uniforms waited. They were both neatly dressed with a single piece of luggage at their feet. The boy had neatly cut blonde hair while the girl had long straight black hair with a flower tucked in above her right ear.

The bus door swung open and the bus driver smiled down at the two of them. "Are you both new students going to Youkai Academy?" His eyes seemed to glow and there was something mocking in his smile.

"We are," the boy answered stoically. The girl offered no more than a slight nod.

"Well then, climb on in and take a seat. Though I should warn you, Youkai Academy can be a very scary place."

"I am sure that it can," the boy answered casually. He and the girl each picked up their luggage and stepped onto the bus.

The bus was about half full with twenty others sitting and talking excitedly to one another. The mix was about even between boys and girls and they all had on the same green uniform.

"For certain people the academy can be much more than just scary," the bus driver said as the door swung shut. "For the wrong sort it can be lethal." The bus driver said in a knowing tone.

The boy sent him a mildly curious look, before offering a respectful nod. "I will keep that in mind bus driver-sama."

The two of them took an empty seat near the back and rode in silence.

The bus exited a tunnel that had been filled with bizarre glowing lights and came out in an overcast and cheerless looking place. It pulled up to a scarecrow with a pumpkin head.

"Last stop, Youkai Academy. Everyone please exit carefully and enjoy your new home. Hopefully you will all survive the experience."

Twenty two students slowly stepped off the bus carrying various sacks, bags, and suitcases.

"Welcome students!" A woman's voice called out. The freshmen looked about until they spotted a woman in a fluffy black and white dress. She had dark brown hair in an odd sort of side pony tail. "My name is Toujyou Ruby, assistant to the Headmaster. I am here to act as a guide to take you to the academy and to the entrance ceremony." She nodded to the school building in the distance.

"Before we set off I will happy to answer any general questions you may have about the school. Please feel free to ask me anything as I have done many, many things since coming to this place."

"Is it true the Headmaster is a demon Lord?" One of the boys called out. The two silent students glanced at one another and listened carefully.

Ruby smiled. "I am afraid I really cannot answer that. All you need know is the Headmaster is a person of great power who takes his responsibilities very seriously. He also cares about protecting the students placed under his care. He has established some new policies to try and make the academy safer than it used to be."

"What sort of policies?" A different to boy asked.

"Well for one all disappearances are now very thoroughly investigated. It used to be if someone went missing very little effort might be put towards trying to find them. Also the Headmaster established the practice of fitting punishments."

"What's that?" A girl called out.

"Well it used to be that most crimes would be punished with expulsion. Even crimes like assault and murder. Now crimes are punished in a manner befitting the crime committed. If someone is assaulted that person will be beaten to a similar degree. If someone commits murder they will be killed. If someone eats a fellow student they will be eaten."

"You're kidding!" Someone shouted.

"Not at all," Ruby said pleasantly. She decided not to mention who it was that carried out those sentences. "You'd be surprised what an effective deterrent it is. Even people who think nothing of eating other sentient beings are horrified by the thought of being eaten themselves. Thanks to these rule changes Youkai Academy has become a much safer place, though it can still be dangerous at times. Please always keep that in mind throughout your time here."

"Is it true that the Headmaster keeps a hundred man bodyguard?"

"The Headmaster has a bodyguard; I cannot reveal the number of guards for obvious reasons."

"Is it true the Headmaster uses youkai kitsune as personal servants?"

"The Headmaster has people of all races in his employ, but it is an academy rule that they all appear human and are not to reveal their true forms at any time. That is a rule that applies to the teachers and employees as much as it does to you students. As part of that rule please do not inquire into anyone's race or reveal your own race to anyone including your fellow students."

"I heard a crazy rumor that there are humans attending this school too," a girl said.

To most everyone's surprise Ruby nodded. "That's true; it is another one of the Headmaster's new policies. Each year he selects a handful of carefully screened human applicants and allows them to attend. They are also required to keep their race a secret so you will not know who they might be."

"Why would he do that?" One boy shouted angrily. "This is supposed to be *our* place! A school just for monsters, why would he allow humans to attend?" Most of the freshmen nodded their heads in agreement.

"The purpose of this school is to teach coexistence between monster and human. The Headmaster found the old policy of killing any humans who learned of this academy to be contradictory to that purpose." Ruby said stoutly. She too had once hated humans and all they stood for. But she had come to understand that she could not blame the whole race for the actions of a relative handful. "He decided it would help monsters to learn to trust humans if they knew some of their classmates were. He also felt the idea of coexistence would be just as valuable for certain humans as well."

"I hear the Headmaster has a beautiful vampire wife!" Another boy called out.

Ruby just shook her head. "What did I just say about not inquiring into anyone's race? If you're all so curious about the Headmaster you'll get a chance to see and hear him at the entrance ceremony. Now please follow me, it's a couple miles to the academy and we wouldn't want to be late."

The students all picked up their luggage and began following her down the dirt road. Two of them were careful to hang back behind the rest.

"It's just as we were led to believe," the girl whispered.

The boy nodded and whispered his own reply. "It is a relief to know our information was accurate. We will only have this one

opportunity."

The girl nodded and said nothing more.

Naruto was relaxing in his favorite chair reading a hardcover book. The book's title, 'The Apology' was written in gold on the spine and front.

"Daddy!" With a squeal of pure delight a little girl leapt up onto his lap.

Naruto set aside his book and took his daughter in both his arms laughing with her as he bounced her up and down on his lap. The little girl cried out in absolute delight. "Play with me daddy!" Her eyes were red and slitted and she had long silver hair that ran halfway down her back. She had tiny little fangs that had been the first, and so far only, teeth to come in. When she smiled she looked just like the little vampire she was. To Naruto his little two year old was easily the most beautiful thing in the world, well except maybe for her mother.

Said mother walked into the study, drawn by their daughter's high pitched squeals. The current incarnation of his beloved Moka had long pink hair and green eyes and looked almost exactly like the girl who had once run him over with her bike. Besides looking just a little older and more mature there was one other difference. The rosario she currently wore had a yellow gem as its centerpiece and was of a plainer design. Unlike the one she had worn back when they first met this one lacked the special enchantment from her mother. That meant she could remove it herself whenever she pleased. And since she wasn't wearing it as a child with a developing psyche it did not create a separate personality. Her appearance was different and most of her powers were suppressed, but otherwise she was exactly the same person who had moved back to the academy with him three years ago.

"Kushina honey, stop playing with daddy. He has to give an important speech in a little while and we need to get ready to go too."

The two year old looked over to her mother and pouted. "Don't wanna, wanna stay and play with daddy."

Moka frowned slightly but Naruto found her pouting just adorable. He gave his little girl a kiss on the cheek. "Now be good honey and I promise after my speech I'll give you some tomato juice."

The prospect of tomato juice was enough to distract her. She looked up at her father and smiled with her two little fangs. "Promise daddy?"

"I promise, now go get ready with your mother."

"Yeah!" She quickly climbed off him and ran out to go to her room.

Moka remained at the door way and gave him an amused look. "You know you're going to completely spoil that child."

Naruto gave her a smile. "Well I'm her dad and she's my little princess so I'm allowed to spoil her some."

Moka pretended to be upset but actually didn't mind. From the moment they had learned she was pregnant it had been pretty obvious that Naruto was going to be a doting father and that she would have to be the disciplinarian in the family. *My husband, the youkai kitsune worship him almost as a god, the people of his village live in dread of his return, and he holds the power of life and death here at this school. Yet his own two year old has him completely wrapped around her finger.* Well that was him in a nutshell, a man of incredible power and ferocity who couldn't bring himself to say no to his precious little girl. Knowing there was no point in trying to get him to be a little more forceful with their daughter she tried something else.

"Shouldn't you be going over your speech right now?"

"No need, it's all right up here." He pointed to his forehead.

She lifted a questioning eyebrow. "You have it memorized?"

"More or less," he admitted.

"What if you forget a part of it?"

"I'll wing it," he said casually.

Shaking her head ruefully Moka went to get her daughter ready.

After leading them to the auditorium Ruby wished them well and left to attend other duties. The new students slowly drifted apart as they searched out open seats. The quiet couple walked deliberately to a row near the back where five other students sat patiently. Without any sort of eye contact or acknowledgement they sat down and formed a group of seven. Together they waited.

Kuyou was outside the Headmaster's residence. The regular guards were standing about providing general security. They were all dressed in black with masks that completely covered their faces and hair. People naturally assumed that these men were especially trained professionals hired to protect the Headmaster. Only a handful of the inner circle knew the truth, that they were all clones created by the Headmaster himself. They provided protection for him and his family.

But Kuyou had been given permission to create the, 'Body Guard Division.' A special unit created and tasked with the sole purpose of guarding their lord and master from any possible threat. They performed investigations and screened all those who wanted access to their lord. They would also sometimes carry out special missions assigned to them by the Great Lord. Like the one planned for today.

The door to the large house opened and out stepped Lord Naruto and his wife with their daughter walking between holding their hands. Kuyou did not like the sight of that. The Great Lord of the youkai kitsune should always appear fearsome and mighty wherever he went and whatever he might do. *Skipping* along with his daughter tended to ruin that image. Nonetheless he walked up along side the Great Lord.

"Do you still intend to visit the shrine today after the ceremony Lord?" Kuyou asked.

"I sure do, but I'll need to make a quick stop to have some tomato juice with my girls first."

Kuyou nodded. "The security arrangements will be in place whenever you arrive my lord."

Naruto looked at him confidently. "I expect nothing less; I know I can trust you Kuyou."

He bowed low. "My Lord, the Body Guard Division will not fail you." He hurried off.

Moka looked over to her husband. "You're visiting the shrine today?"

He nodded and smiled down at Kushina. "Yeah, after the ceremony and after we all get some tomato juice."

"Juice!" Kushina yelped happily.

Moka looked at her husband and spoke casually. "Is there anything I should know about?"

"Nothing important."

They came in through the back of the auditorium and were greeted by several people.

"Aunty!" Kushina shouted and ran forward.

"Hey there kiddo," Kokoa smiled and picked up her little niece. The third year student smiled at her mischievously. "You getting in trouble?"

"Yeah!" Kushina cried enthusiastically. "We're getting juice after!"

Kokoa laughed a bit and looked over to her sister. "She doesn't quite get the concept of trouble yet does she?"

"I pray that she never does," Moka took her daughter back into her own arms. "Or at least not for a few more years." Moka eyed her sister suspiciously. "What are you doing here by the way? Only the freshmen are required to attend this."

"I just thought I would get a jump start on scouting the freshmen; see if any of them look promising. As captain of the martial arts club I want to try and get some more members." Kokoa gave her older sister an inviting smile. "You know since I have some free time..."

"I am not having another stupid duel with you," Moka sounded thoroughly exasperated.

"Oh come on!" Kokoa pleaded. "Just one little duel..."

As this was going on the former head of the martial arts club and current head of the physical education department came up to him.

"Never thought I'd see the day a girl was captain of martial arts." Kenpachi said with a wicked grin. "Though she is kind of scary when she gets mad."

Naruto looked to where his wife and sister in law were still arguing. "Yeah, it runs in the family."

The seventeen year old head of the math department came up to him. She had her very handsome husband standing beside her. It was good to see Yukari so happy. Being a genius she had completed her education by age fourteen. Just in time to come join him back at the old stomping grounds. She'd still been eager to share a bed with him and Moka. Moka had still been just as eager not to share. Naruto had compromised by agreeing to make a doppelganger for her when she hit sixteen.

Cute little Yukari had filled out rather nicely and was very happy as a teacher and department head. She was also very happy with her husband who went by the name of Tsukune. She used a magical spell (witch's version of henge) to disguise him so no one realized he was a copy of the Headmaster. For Naruto it was a little weird having a, 'brother' living at the academy, but he got used to it.

From behind a curtain he looked out at about six hundred eager and nervous faces. As he waited to go out Ruby approached him. She had arrived at the academy a few months after he had been expelled. The previous Headmaster had brought her here and had never revealed her circumstances. From talking to Ruby over the years he'd gotten the sense she had no family and that she had suffered some sort of tragedy. But she had never offered any details and he was not going to pry. She had proven a wonderfully efficient and devoted assistant. Always ready to do many, many things to help out. She came up to him to report in.

"All buses arrived on schedule, of six hundred and fifteen expected arrivals only nine were absent from pick up." Ruby stated.

"That's about normal for the first day of a new class." He looked at her seriously. "And the other thing?"

"Seven arrived on five different buses," she looked very unhappy. "That means the seven originals..."

Naruto shook his head. "It's a terrible shame, but there was nothing we could do. We didn't know which ones would be involved. Where are they now?"

"All under surveillance, they're sitting as a group in the audience." Ruby looked at him nervously. "Is it really all right to just leave them alone? What if they try something during the ceremony?"

"Trust me they won't, it's not their way." Naruto said. "They won't act here when they have to know my security is at its strongest. They'll try and wait for a moment when I'm alone and vulnerable."

"Will you be?" Ruby asked worriedly.

He smiled at her reassuringly. "I am never alone and I am definitely never vulnerable. Now if you'll excuse it's time for me to give my speech."

From behind the curtain he walked out onto the stage in the white robes that represented his office. Seeing him the six hundred or so students quickly settled down and quieted. In the realm of monsters he had made quite a splash and become the source of many wild rumors (some of which were even accurate.) The most important thing was that he took his job and his responsibilities very seriously. He wanted to protect the lives that were entrusted to him and to teach them tolerance and acceptance of those who were different. That being a lesson very close to his heart.

He smiled out at all those faces looking up at him. "Welcome to Youkai Academy. I am the Headmaster; let me begin by saying..."

Following the speech the students had been required to find their homerooms so that they could meet their homeroom teachers and some of their classmates. Seven of the students quickly and quietly slipped away from the rest to begin to explore the academy grounds. Though in truth they were not exploring so much as they were

searching for someone. They had only today to accomplish their goal.

One of the seven spotted their target. He was sitting on a bench with his wife and daughter drinking some beverages from a vending machine. Keeping a safe distance the student put the target under observation. After about fifteen minutes or so he kissed his wife and daughter goodbye and they proceeded to head in opposite directions with the target heading out into the woods.

The seven of them gathered and formed a loose formation, carefully trailing behind the target as they went deeper and deeper into the woods. They noted that there was a good bit of wildlife present.

Foxes seemed especially prevalent.

As Naruto walked along he took a sniff of the air and nodded to himself.

Hidden away on the academy grounds was a small building that had nothing at all to do with the school. It appeared on no academy map or on any list of facilities. It had not been built with school funds and no committee had ever been asked to approve its construction. The materials had been bought and paid for using the funds that had been part of the Namikaze fortune. The building had been built through the labor of just one man using a few hundred clones.

In design it was nothing more than a simple eastern style shrine. Though only the best white marble had been used for its construction. Inside were a pair of statues also of white marble. These were life size representations of his mother and father. Buried within the shrine floor were their remains. Said remains having been reclaimed (he did not consider it theft) from Konoha by fifty clones on the night he departed the village. According to Tayuya there was never any mention about his mom's grave being dug up.

But that the whole village had gone into mourning when they found out their beloved Yondaime was gone. Some of the villagers had even started to go around saying it was a sign that Konoha was doomed.

About that they were right.

He had never really understood how the villagers could love the father so much while hating the son so utterly. One had stopped the Kyuubi and one had held it prisoner, both had made a sacrifice for their sakes. Yet the villagers never saw it that way. They only ever acknowledged the sacrifice the father had made while trying to exterminate the son. Being the Yondaime's last living relative, well before his daughter's birth at any rate, Naruto had considered the remains to belong to the family and to him. It had given him the greatest satisfaction to place his parents side by side as they'd wanted and to put them in a place no one from Konoha would ever be able to reach.

Moka had come here with him on a few occasions but he mostly came alone. He would start bringing Kushina with him when she got a little older; she was also a descendent after all. She bore the proud name of Uzumaki Kushina. (He had decided to return to his mother's name as that was the one he had been forced to suffer under.) He lit some incense and offered up some prayers. He did not stay too long though.

He was about a quarter mile from the shrine when he finally halted. This would be a safe enough distance.

"You may as well come out now," Naruto called. "There's no point in hiding anymore."

He waited patiently as the seven academy students came out of the woods surrounding him. He glanced at the only girl among them and at the blonde haired boy standing at her side.

"It's been a long time hasn't it? Nice to meet you again Pein and Konan."

I see," the blonde boy said. All at once all seven of them were surrounded by smoke as they released their henges. "How did you see through our disguises?"

Naruto simply tapped his nose. The Akatsuki were all focused on him and so did notice ten ordinary looking foxes talking position in a much wider circle around them. "I actually knew you were coming, though I didn't know you were bringing your six bodies and your partner. I was actually hoping to have the entire organization here so I could deal with all of you today." He shrugged. "I guess I'll have to hunt them all down at some point. But with you and Madara gone they won't be any sort of threat."

The six ninja with the rinnegan readied themselves as did Konan. Pein took Naruto's words as nothing but empty bluster. He might be the strongest of them but they had captured eight biju. Today, after years of investigation and planning, they would finally take the ninth. "I have never been defeated in battle and know the weaknesses of the biju. Please surrender and I promise you that you will not be forced to suffer and no unnecessary harm will be done to anyone else."

Naruto laughed at that. "Oh I know you're not going to harm me or anyone else, that's why I led you out here away from the academy." He looked directly into Pein's eyes. "You don't get it do you? I'm nothing at all like the biju you've captured. I could kill a million like you and never be in danger. You're not the hunter here, you're the rabbit. And you're about to be devoured." He looked past Pein and the others in their black robes with red clouds. "Do it!"

Pein and the rest were all caught off guard as ten ordinary looking foxes suddenly transformed into final form youkai kitsune. These were all members of the Body Guard Division. All of them youkai kitsune with a minimum of two fiery tails. Working together they cast

their joint spell. A gold colored dome of energy rose all about them and sealed them in.

The Akatsuki looked about in momentary confusion before turning to face an amused Naruto. "This will still not save you." Pein told him.

"Save me?" Naruto laughed. "It's not meant to save me, it's meant to keep you rabbits from escaping. It will also hide all the demonic aura I'm about to unleash. I don't want all the new students being scared to death on their very first day." Naruto opened himself up and allowed the limitless swell of power to fill him. "Let me show you *exactly* what it was my father faced that day."

Pein and the rest could do nothing but watch as Naruto took on his ultimate **nine** tail form. Madara alone might have been able to control this monster. Had Pein known the Shiki Fujin and had a newborn to act as a container he might have stood a chance. But as it was there was literally nothing he could do against what he was facing.

" Now then," an inhuman voice boomed. **"I think I'll eat you."**

Naruto strolled into his home whistling a happy tune. Moka heard him and popped her head out of the kitchen. "Dinner is almost ready dear."

"Oh, sorry Moka-chan," he called back. "I've already eaten."

Moka came into his study to find him in his favorite chair reading a familiar book.

"Kushina's asleep, are you coming to bed?" Moka had a certain evil look in her eyes that told him she wasn't asking him if he was ready to go to sleep.

"Sure," he answered eagerly and snapped the book shut.

She noticed it. "You've been reading that same book for the last six months. Have you still not finished it?"

He set it on his desk. "I finished it a long time ago, I keep re-reading it."

"Why?" She asked. "Is it really that good?"

"Well... you might say it was written just for me. It's one of godfather's books."

Having traveled for so long with him and being forced to wait as he went on his many perverted, 'research' trips Moka frowned dangerously. "Kushina may not be able to read yet but I won't have any of that disgusting pornography in this house."

"It's not that sort of book." Naruto said.

"It's not?" She was genuinely amazed. She didn't think Jiraiya wrote any other kind.

"Tayuya sent this to me. She had trouble getting a copy; it's been banned not just in Konoha but in all of Fire country."

"Banned? And it's not perverted?"

Naruto shook his head. "It's a tragedy, though really it's nothing but a thinly veiled autobiography. It's about this powerful ninja who wins great renown and is deeply respected by the people he serves. He has a student who he loves like a son and who he supports in becoming the village leader. But tragically one day the leader and his wife die as the result of an attack by a terrible demon. The demon is defeated and locked into the leader's new born son. The leader's dying wish was that his son be seen as a hero. The leader entrusted his beloved sensei with the responsibility of protecting and raising his son. But this sensei, this great and revered hero, this man who loved his leader like a son, turned his back on that responsibility and fled under the guise of carrying out important missions of the village. He

left the child behind in a village where he would be hated and abused."

Naruto paused to look at the book again. "When he meets the boy again fifteen years later he betrays him a second time because of orders. From that moment on the boy despises him. He spends the rest of his life trying to make up for his mistakes but it's much too late as the boy refuses to forgive no matter what he does. Finally one day the boy returns from a long absence and the hero goes to him and offers him a very touching and heartfelt apology. The words are actually very poignant and moving, they show you the man's heart and how deeply he regrets what he did." He paused.

Moka waited but Naruto did not continue. "Was that it?" She asked. "Is that how the story ends?"

"No," he said quietly. "Despite his words the boy refuses to forgive, instead he kills him, and burns the village to the ground."

The true monsters

Author's Notes: Hope you all enjoy the end of the story. I have been surprised by how many of you have asked about a sequel. Currently I have three other stories active and want to work on those. I will however leave the possibility open for the future. Any of you who are interested please say so in a comment and please feel free to suggest what sort you might like to see

October 9

They were staying in one of the most expensive suites in the city of Nagamo, on the coast about a thousand miles from the leaf village. She was staring out at the ocean trying to calm her fearful heart. She was filled with a sense of dread and couldn't honestly explain why. The previous two years she and her sister had been ordered to come here around this same time and enjoy a holiday by the sea. Her sister had been happy just at the chance to have a week's worth of unsupervised free time. But she couldn't help but wonder at the uncharacteristic generosity of father. She was certain there was a reason why he wanted both of his daughters out of the village on Naruto-kun's birthday.

"Neechan," Hanabi called. "Let's go down to dinner, and then let's go to one of the casinos! Since I have access to the family accounts we have plenty of money to play with."

Hinata forced a relaxed smile on her face and told herself she was being silly. There was no reason to be fearful; this was just a little holiday after all. She turned to face her little sister and seemed in her usual good humor. "Don't lose too much money or father may be upset with us."

"Of course I won't!" Hanabi answered. "Now let's go!"

The two daughters of the Hyuuga clan headed downstairs to enjoy a carefree evening.

It had happened exactly as she'd been told it would. She'd been on a mission in Grass country and had deserted her team while on watch. She'd come to the entrance of a tunnel and waited. Sure enough at the appointed time a set of lights had appeared from within the tunnel and this huge yellow monstrosity had exited. As a method of taking her to another world she thought the thing looked dubious. Dubious or not she had still climbed aboard.

She sat down in one of the empty seats without a word.

The strange man who seemed to be in control of this device looked back at her with a grin. "You **are** Tayuya?"

"I am," she answered curtly.

"Is this your first time to Youkai Academy?"

"Wherever it is we're going it's my first time." The message had only told her she was being extracted. It hadn't mentioned any destination.

"Well then," he said gleefully. "I think I should just warn you, Youkai Academy can be a very scary place."

She laughed. "Don't worry; I'm used to scary places." Living with the Inuzukas the last few years had not been too bad. But after living with vampires as a snack and serving under an insane and bloodthirsty Sannin she doubted anything else could really scare her.

The big contraption turned itself around and went back into the tunnel. As it traveled they were surrounded by strange lights. The bizarre sight made her just a little nervous but she told herself to calm down and relax. After a longer journey than she'd expected they exited the tunnel of lights and came out in an almost pitch black

place. They pulled up to what looked like a scarecrow and came to a stop.

"This is your destination, please be careful exiting the bus." He opened up the door.

"This is it?" She looked out but saw nothing at all but darkness.

"The academy itself is a short walk from here. Don't worry; someone will be here to show you the way. Now please exit the bus."

She didn't like it, but there wasn't a real choice. She stepped off into the darkened landscape. The door shut behind her and the yellow creation pulled away and left.

"Hello Tayuya," a familiar voice called to her.

She turned in the direction of the voice but could still see nothing.
"Naruto-sama?"

She heard him chuckling and his foot steps coming nearer. "I've told you before, just plain Naruto will do. Thanks for sending me the book, I found it interesting." He finally came close enough for her to see him. He was in his vampiric form and dressed in loose fitting white robes.

"I thought you might," Tayuya said. "That's a new look for you. I don't believe I've ever seen you in white."

He shrugged. "I'm not a ninja anymore, speaking of which neither are you. You have served me well Tayuya; you have been an excellent spy."

She bowed slightly to him. "I am very glad to hear that. I am just happy to have served."

He came up to her and smiled. "You have, and I am ready to give you what I promised. Are you prepared to become a vampire?"

She nodded eagerly. "Yes." She stepped back though when she saw him pull out a kunai.

Naruto gave her an amused look. "Relax; this is for me not for you." He sliced open his wrist and let his blood flow out. "Drink as much as you can as fast as you can."

"You want me to drink your blood?!"

"It's the only sure way to become a vampire. I could inject my blood into you if you prefer, but then the odds are only one in three of your turning. It might also kill you or turn you into a mindless killing machine called a, 'ghoul,' in which case I would have to destroy you. Now drink."

She hesitated for just second, but finally put her mouth his wound. She pressed her lips around the torn skin and began to suck the hot salty blood. She used her tongue to lap it up and swallow it down her throat. It felt sickening and wrong but she shut her eyes and sucked trying to imagine it was something else.

She suddenly stopped as she felt a stabbing pain in the pit of her stomach. She let go of him and dropped to her knees clutching her sides. As a ninja she'd been wounded many times but this felt worse than anything she could imagine. It felt like something inside was ripping up her guts. "Hu... hurts!" she called out.

Naruto looked down sympathetically. "Don't worry, its normal. Your body is being transformed from the inside out into a brand new lifeform, almost like being born a second time. It wasn't like this for me, but my father in law says it's excruciatingly painful and lasts for a few hours."

She looked up at him with watery eyes. "You cou... could ha... have said." She clamped down her teeth and tried not to scream.

"Sorry," he gave her an embarrassed grin which did nothing to help. "I could knock you out if..."

"Yes! Please!"

Nodding he brought a fist down on the back of her head and mercifully rendered her unconscious.

When he returned home there was loud laughter coming from the parlor. He decided to take the unconscious Tayuya upstairs to one of the empty bedrooms before going to join everyone else.

When he came back downstairs he walked in on a very merry scene. There seated on a couch was the fearsome Lord Akashiya. He had Kushina on his lap and was playing, 'peek a boo' with her to their mutual delight. The vampire elder adored his little granddaughter.

On another couch Mai and Moka were chatting over some tomato juice. With both of them having pink hair and green eyes they looked much more like sisters than mother and daughter.

Sitting on the floor was the only person with an unhappy face. Kokoa was wearing a gown that Karua had forced her into and was having her hair combed by her older sister. Karua was having a fun time playing / torturing her little sis.

The family had come by to help him celebrate his 21st birthday tomorrow.

Kushina was the very first person to notice his arrival and jumped off her grandfather's lap to run over to him. "Daddy!" She cried excitedly and held out her arms to him.

"There's my little princess." He scooped her up and planted kisses on her face as she giggled.

"Daddy, daddy, are we having cake and juice tomorrow?!" She asked excitedly. She didn't quite have the concept of birthdays down yet, but she knew she liked cake and tomato juice.

"We sure are honey, as much as you want."

"Yeah!" she said happily.

"Did everything go all right?" Moka asked.

"It went fine," Naruto told her. He gave his daughter one more kiss and set her down so she could run back over to play some more with granddad. "She was in a lot of pain though so I knocked her out. She's sleeping upstairs right now."

"The pain is normal," Mai assured. "She should be fine and feeling pretty ravenous come the morning. Make sure to have plenty of transfusion packs on hand."

Naruto nodded. "Already set, she'll even get to celebrate with us tomorrow."

"You are much too generous with your servants," Lord Akashiya said as he bounced his granddaughter on his knee. "Rewarding her like that after just a few years of service?" He shook his head.

"Now dear be kind," Mai said disapprovingly. "She is his servant after all and he can reward her as he sees fit."

"She did risk her life for me. If anyone had found out she was my spy she would have been tortured and executed." Naruto said.

Karua looked up from combing her little sister's hair. "Niisan," she called out. "Will there be dancing at the party tomorrow?"

"Ah, not really, it's just a little get together. It's not that sort of party." Naruto said and rubbed the back of his head.

Karua frowned and pouted a bit. "Awww, I'm disappointed. I wish daddy had eaten you and sister had married the other one."

"Other one?" Kushina looked curiously at her aunt.

"It's nothing," Mai said pleasantly and gave Karua a warning look. Moka sent her a look that was openly hostile.

"Well maybe niisan's not too bad." She went back to combing Kokoa's hair.

Naruto took it all in stride. Having not grown up with a family he found dealing with the various family dynamics... interesting. He sat down on the couch next to his wife and relaxed.

That night he was in his study, again rereading the book.

The two ninja stood atop the Tower of the Sun, the highest building in the village hidden within the sunlight. The two of them were reunited once more, and for the final time. Jibo, hero of his village and ninja of legend, he was weary and heartsick now. He had begun to really look like an old man, and that was what he felt like. Standing across from him was his Nakira, his godson and the container of the nine tail Wolf Demon. A fearsome young ninja just coming into his prime and radiating the massive power of the demon he contained.

It broke Jibo's heart to see the rage and hatred there in Nakira's eyes. He should have been the village's greatest hero. He should have been following in his father's footsteps. But now instead he was following the path of the Demon. He had come here not as the village's protector but as its destroyer.

Nakira smiled cruelly at the old ninja. "Aren't you going to try and kill me godfather?"

"No Nakira," Jibo said sadly. "I don't want to kill you."

"You tried to last time," Nakira reminded him.

"You left me no choice."

"And you don't have one now either."

That was when Jibo did something that took the younger ninja by surprise. He knelt down and bowed his head. "Nakira, please forgive me."

"Forgive you?" Nakira echoed in disbelief. "Is this some kind of joke old man?"

"It's no joke godson," Jibo said his heart breaking. "Don't you think I know how I failed you? Don't you think I've spent every day since our last meeting thinking about all the things that I did wrong and all the ways I caused you harm? If there were anything I could possibly do to make it up to you I would."

"Fine!" Nakira said angrily. "Push back time to the day I was born and do what you promised you would! Stay in the village to raise me, or take me away with you but don't abandon me! Make me your son and treat me the way a father would! Isn't that what you promised my father you would do when you became my godfather? Why did you even become my godfather in the first place?"

"Because your father wanted me to and I was too honored to say no." Jibo confessed. "Please understand Nakira, I never once imagined your parents might both die. Your mother was a powerful ninja, and your father was a legend even greater than I was. When I became your godfather I imagined going to your birthdays and taking you on trips with me and becoming your sensei one day. Try and understand that after that terrible night when your parents died my heart was torn out of me, he really was like my son. I knew what my duty to him and to you was, but it was more than I could bear. So I ran away."

Nakira stared at him. "If you'd run away for a week or a month or even a year it wouldn't have mattered. You could have come back! You could have taken time to heal your heart and then returned. I spent **eight** years being tortured and abused. The villagers never would have treated me that way if they'd known I was the great Jibo's son. You could have come back for me but you never did."

"I know that," Jibo hung his head in shame. "Just as I know I betrayed your trust when I placed that second seal on you. Orders or not I should never have agreed to do that. You're right; I never did come back for you. When we met it was because I was on a mission. If I'd been half the man I should have been I'd have come for you. But in the end, I was too much of a coward. I could face death and battle, but the idea of being responsible for a child frightened me. I suppose that in my heart I have always been a child myself. I never wanted the responsibility and so I ran. Forgive me Nakira, please forgive me."

Nakira stared at him. And for that one moment everything seemed to hang in the balance. The possibility of forgiveness and of peace seemed within reach.

"Too late," he whispered. Then in a louder voice as he gathered the full might that was his, filling the air with red chakra. "Too late, too late, too late, TOO FUCKING LATE!!" He screamed. Flames danced all around him as he transformed from a handsome young man into a demon. "I WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU!!" With those words he sent a stream of fire down onto his godfather and former sensei.

Jibo made no effort to dodge or run. He shut his eyes and accepted his godson's condemnation.

With his godfather killed he looked down upon the village that had hated and hurt him. He could have been their champion, their greatest hero. But their hatred had made him their enemy instead. Without hesitation he brought the fire down upon them. He unleashed it on ninja and civilian, on adult and child, on guilty and innocent.

Killing them all, and turning the proud village into a vast funeral pyre.

Thus did the great ninja village perish.

THE END

Naruto had read that part a hundred times at least. It disturbed him because he could see himself saying those exact words and taking those same actions. Reading Jiraiya's words made him wonder about his decision.

When Moka walked into the study she found him sitting there behind his desk brooding and staring down at the book.

"It's after midnight," she told him in a sultry voice. "Happy birthday my beloved." She was wearing a long satin nightgown that covered most of her body but showed off her curves nicely. She sauntered over to him and began to massage his shoulders. "Come to bed, and I'll give you your present." She whispered in his ear.

He nodded and stood. "That sounds a lot better than staying down here." He slipped his arms around her waist and gave her a welcome kiss. "I love you."

She smiled and gave him a nice slow kiss of her own. "And I love you, let's go upstairs." She took his hand and led the way.

October 10

I'll come back on my birthday to finish it.

For Hiashi those few words had hung over his head like a pall for the last three years. It was like a sentence of death that was commuted each year at the last moment. Though he had never shared that message with anyone else he was far from the only one feeling anxious today. For many years October tenth had been a day of wild celebration as the village commemorated the Yondaime's heroic victory over the Kyuubi. But since the night of Naruto's bloody departure the people of the village had tried very hard to pretend the Kyuubi, and the Kyuubi's container had never existed. Officially October tenth was no longer a holiday. Unofficially many people still treated it as a special day. But rather than a day for feasting and fireworks it had instead become a day of solemn mourning and

prayer. Many of the older generation would spend this day fasting and making offerings in the various shrines. As though prayers could protect the village from the Kyuubi's wrath.

Hiashi had no faith in prayers. He was a ninja; his faith was in kunai and in jutsus. Since the day of Naruto's departure he'd had his agents scouring the entire world searching for any clue to his whereabouts. He'd offered a ten million ryo reward for any information that led to Naruto. But all he'd come up with in the last three years had been a long series of false leads. So far as they could tell Naruto had simply disappeared from the face of the earth. Hiashi had even tried to contact the mysterious Headmaster in hopes getting some information. Unfortunately the Headmaster had severed all ties with the ninja world. And Hiashi had no other connections to the realm of monsters. Wherever Naruto was, in this world or some other, he remained too well hidden to be found.

So all that was left to him was to attend to his usual duties today with calm dignity and wait to see if the death sentence would be carried out or delayed for one more year. His duty demanded that he be present in Konoha, but he had sent his two daughters far away to safety. Whatever happened to him, his daughters and his clan would survive.

The door to his office opened and a familiar face entered. He nodded politely. "Good morning Hokage-sama." Jiraiya said.

The Hokage looked up from his endless stack of paperwork and frowned. Since that wretched book had come out he'd had to deal with even more anxiety and worry from the villagers. There were also a handful of idiots who went around moaning that the village was cursed and doomed. Thousands of people had simply left and moved away. If the trend continued the ninja of the village would begin to suffer from lack of support services. Ninja were still people, they did not want to live somewhere without restaurants or shops or bath houses. It was just one more headache that he did not need.

"What do you want Jiraiya?" Hiashi asked curtly. Though he had little use for the Sannin the ninja and common folk still loved and admired him. Privately Hiashi blamed Jiraiya for their current predicament. The seal he'd placed on Naruto had failed, had it been competently made Naruto would be dead now and the village prospering.

Jiraiya wasted no words. "I think we should evacuate the village," he said quietly.

Hiashi stopped looking at his papers and turned his full attention to Jiraiya. "Evacuate the village? Do you have any idea the sort of panic that would cause? Do you know how many civilians would leave permanently? Why are you even suggesting this?"

"Because Naruto will return today." He answered simply.

"Why do you say that?" Hiashi demanded. Hiashi had never told Jiraiya about the note. Was it possible Naruto had sent him a similar message as well? "What information do you have that leads you to that conclusion?"

"I don't have any information," Jiraiya admitted. "It's just a feeling I have."

"A feeling?" Hiashi repeated contemptuously. "You want me to evacuate the entire village and cause panic because you have a feeling?"

"If you don't like that word you can use estimated guess instead. I know Naruto better than anyone else here and I know what he's capable of. I think it very possible that he has achieved the nine tail state by now. And if he has I can't imagine a better day for his return than today."

"Do you have *any* evidence at all to support this suspicion of yours?"

Jiraiya could only shake his head.

"Then I am not about to order an evacuation simply on the *possibility* something might happen today." Hiashi smiled thinly. "If you wish to however you have my blessing to leave the village for as long as you like."

Jiraiya looked down at the seated Hiashi. "I'm not going anywhere, and so we're clear on this, I don't need your permission to leave or enter Konoha." He shook his head wearily. "You know on the chance this really is my last day I want you to know you are a damn poor Hokage. Minato and Sarutobi were both much better men than you and they **truly** cared for the people of this village. If I'd known what a piss poor Hokage you would be I'd have taken the job when it was offered to me."

Hiashi sent the man a furious glare. "Get out!"

Grinning he performed an exaggerated bow. "Hai Hokage-sama." He then walked out, deliberately slamming the door behind him.

Hiashi stared out the window for a moment. He would never admit it but Jiraiya's words had badly shaken him. He truly wondered if today would be the day the death sentence was finally carried out. But even if he felt fear he would not show any. He returned to his paperwork. He was not about to order an evacuation and give into doubt.

He was dressed in his black ninja outfit. This would be the last time he would ever wear it. Oh he would still have battles in his future, and times when he would have to kill to protect the ones he loved or the ones he was responsible for. But in those future battles he would be acting as Headmaster or as Great Lord of the youkai kitsune. He would fight as father, or as husband, as brother, or as son.

But for today, for one final time, he would be ninja. His heart was filled with hatred and the need for revenge. Jiraiya's words had touched him, and he had really thought about them and about what he meant to do. But in the end he found he could not turn away from

this path. He could just not forgive them. What had finally decided him was a single memory from his eighth birthday. What a nameless stranger had said to him just before he'd dropped the match that had lit him on fire.

You deserve this. The man had just been another in a crowd. Naruto knew the man's face but had never known his name, and had never tried to learn it. It didn't matter who he was as an individual. What mattered was that he represented the attitudes and desires of the village as a whole. The village had hated him. The village had tortured him. The village had tried to murder him as a helpless child. And the village had never changed its feelings or even asked forgiveness. Unlike with his godfather the village had never apologized or even changed its mind about him. The hatred had *always* been there. The abuse had only stopped due to fear, there had never been an ounce of regret or any admission that they had done wrong by making him suffer all those years.

So as far as he was concerned the whole damn village was guilty and the whole damn village was going to pay for it. And if that meant some innocents had to die along with the guilty... so be it. The wrongs done to him could not be forgiven or allowed to go unpunished.

From behind his darling wife put her arms around his shoulders and placed gentle kisses on his neck. "Remember dear, Kushina wants to start having cake by noon and she wants her daddy here for that. Please don't be late." She turned his face so they were eye to eye. "Do what you need to, my beloved. Avenge the wrongs done to you and destroy those who are your enemies. But when you are done come home to the family that loves you and needs you."

He smiled at her and kissed her. How did she always know exactly the right thing to say to him? "I will Moka-chan; I'll always come home to you and my little princess."

A couple miles into the woods one hundred youkai kitsune waited for him. Every one of them with at least two tails, and every one of them was a willing volunteer. As a unit they could easily fight and defeat whole armies. At his approach they all fell upon their knees and cast their eyes to the ground.

"My Lord," Kuyou intoned. "The Body Guard Division stands ready."

"Does everyone understand their orders?" Naruto asked seriously.

"We do Lord," Kuyou assured him. "None will be permitted to escape."

"No one caught inside will escape," Naruto clarified. "Let anyone who ends up outside the net go. I want a few survivors to tell the tale. I want the world to know what happens today."

"Yes my Lord," Kuyou answered.

Naruto smiled. He was in vampiric form and his fangs were out. "Well then, let's begin operation; 'Because they deserve it.'"

Naruto vanished in a burst of black fire. Throughout the area a hundred circles of white light appeared and then blinked out.

Naruto appeared atop the Hokage Tower and immediately surrounded himself with a red chakra cloak with five tails. Outside the village walls and along the base of the cliff a hundred youkai kitsune appeared literally out of thin air. Even as guards along the wall began to shout out an alarm they worked their magic. A massive dome of gold energy rose up and surrounded the entire village. Except for the handful of people on the road or within the cliff shelters everyone in Konoha was now trapped.

Standing atop the roof Naruto nodded, satisfied that no one could escape now. At least not without his permission. Since Ayame and her father had left long ago there were only two people he was

willing to spare. Hinata was one, but her father had already taken care of that. Naruto had mixed feelings about that. On the one hand he found it pathetic that the Hokage would keep the contents of his message secret but use the knowledge to protect his family. On the other hand as a father he could appreciate the importance of protecting a daughter no matter what.

That left only one other person. Naruto waited patiently as he was sure he would come to face him. Five tails was only a fraction of what he could bring but was more than enough to announce his presence to every ninja in the village.

Sure enough less than thirty seconds after arrival there was a swirl of wind and leaves.

Naruto nodded to him respectfully. "Hello godfather."

"Hello Naruto," Jiraiya said solemnly.

"I read your book," Naruto told him. "It's actually a great read, especially the end."

"I'm glad that you at least read it." Jiraiya said.

"I have one question about it though," Naruto said. "Why did you have it end that way? Don't most books usually have a happy ending?"

"I've always believed in trying to tell honest stories Naruto." Jiraiya explained. "The characters may be larger than life and the situations extreme. But I always try to make the characters be true to themselves. When I came to it I just couldn't imagine any other way for it to end."

"Huh, to be honest I don't know whether to take that as a compliment or not. But you were off about one thing godfather." Naruto paused. "I forgive you."

"You do?" Jiraiya said in surprise.

"Yes I do, I can forgive you because I honestly believe you are sorry for what you did to me. You can go; my servants will open a hole in the dome for you."

"I can go? What about the village?"

Naruto frowned. "That part of your book was dead on. I haven't come here for tea. This is the day I settle all accounts."

"But Naruto, if you can forgive me why not them? Most of the people living here have never done anything to you."

"So what?" Naruto demanded. "Do I look like a damn accountant to you? Do you think I'm going to go door to door and figure who's guilty and who's not? The whole village tortured me so the whole village can pay."

"That's not justice Naruto, that's nothing but pure revenge."

Naruto laughed. "Don't try and play high and mighty with me godfather. I was in Suna remember? Just what the hell would you call the massacre there? Are you going to try and tell me that slaughter was justice but this one is not? Call them both justice or call them both revenge, it comes down to the same thing. When you get the chance you destroy the enemy completely you take it. You don't let worries about innocents get in the way. Yeah, I may be bloodthirsty, but let's not pretend the Hokage and the village were any different."

Jiraiya looked distraught and nodded painfully. "I can't deny what you've said Naruto. We had the chance to do the right thing in Suna, but instead we took the easy path. When we've had the chance we haven't shown much mercy," he spoke slowly and with great sadness. "Maybe this is divine retribution for what we've done to others."

Naruto couldn't help but laugh. "Wouldn't that make me an agent of Kami? I don't think anyone would put me on that side of things. Anyway since we both agree the village is getting what it deserves why don't you go while you have the chance?"

But to Naruto's disappointment Jiraiya shook his head. "Even if it might be deserved, in the end I am still a Leaf nin. I cannot abandon my village. If Konoha is to be destroyed I would choose to die with those I am sworn to protect."

Naruto looked at him. *He really is a ninja; even if he is perverted and silly at times he really is a ninja.* "Is that your final decision godfather?" Naruto asked quietly.

"It is," Jiraiya said stoutly.

Slowly Naruto nodded, he was actually surprised at how strongly he suddenly cared. This was the end for the gallant Jiraiya. "Very well, I will respect your decision godfather." The time had finally come. He opened himself up and let all the power flow into him. "Goodbye."

He transformed into his final nine tail form. As his body turned to living fire and began to expand the entire Tower was crushed beneath him. Jiraiya made no effort to escape.

Within his office Hiashi met his end with dignity as the world literally crashed down upon him. Just before his death he wished his daughters happiness and long life.

When the transformation was complete a massive nine tail fox composed of living flame stood towering above the village. The Hokage Tower lay crushed to rubble beneath a single paw. The nine tail fox could hear the maddening roar of thousands of screams rising into the air. From every direction the brave ninja of Konoha launched themselves at him in a mad rush. Dimly he picked out the sound of birds chirping, cries about the springtime of youth, a couple shadows merged with his to no effect, someone actually tried to take over his mind and it felt like a tiny annoying voice somewhere in the

background. Genjutsus were cast and he was struck by all sorts of weapons and explosive tags. He was hit by multiple jutsus using lightning, water, wind, earth, and even fire. He shrugged off the combined might of Konoha's ninja as a lion might have shrugged off a few flea bites.

This was why he'd waited until he'd had nine tails. No ninjutsu and no weapon could harm him. He opened his mouth and spoke.

" People of Konoha," his monstrous voice crashed down on them. **"Know that I am not Kyuubi or any other demon. I am Uzumaki Naruto, son of Namikaze Minato and Uzumaki Kushina. I was born in this village and would have been your willing servant and protector. But your own hatred towards me would never allow that. If I am your enemy it is because you chose to make me that. I am certain you see me as a monster. Know then that to my eyes the people of this village are the true monsters. When I was a helpless child the people of this village tried to burn me alive. It was a crime committed by this village against me, a crime that was never punished. But today there will be punishment."** He slapped his head back and opened wide his jaws. **"YOU DESERVE THIS!"** And out of his mouth poured a river of white fire. It filled the streets and consumed everything it touched. Ninja and villagers died instantly. Steel and glass melted while stone cracked apart and turned to dust. The fire poured and poured and poured out of him until the entire space beneath the gold dome was engulfed in it.

When he finally finished there was nothing left of the village, not even rubble. There was nothing but square miles of blackened earth. The Hokage monument was left *mostly* intact. The faces of the first four Hokages remained, but where the fifth one would have been there were only claw marks.

Thus did the great ninja village perish.

THE END